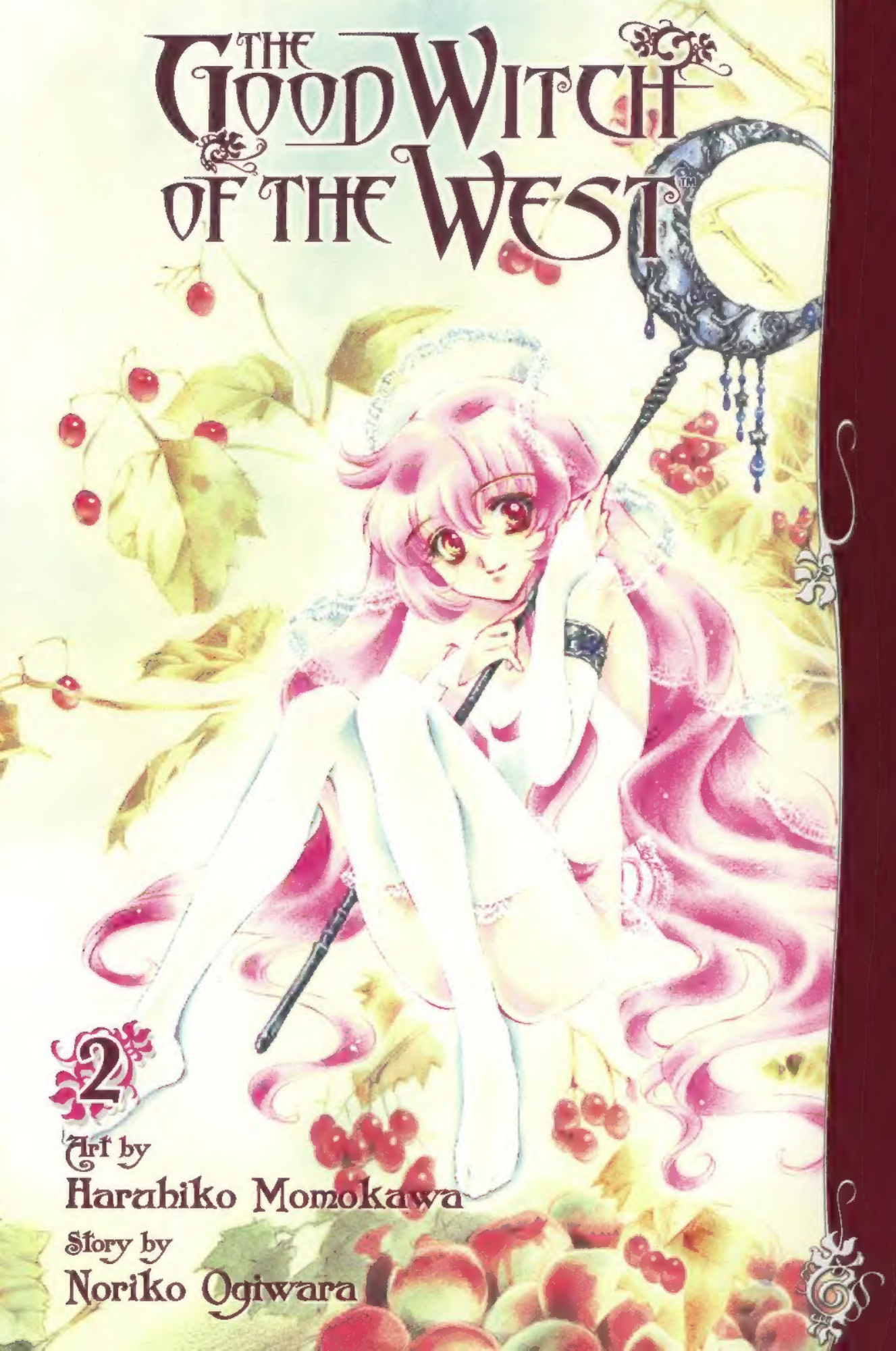
THE GOOD WITCH OF THE WEST™



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Art by
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Story by
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The Good Witch of the West Volume 2

Story By Noriko Ogiwara

Illustrated by Haruhiko Momokawa

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THE GOOD WITCH OF THE WEST™

Story by Noriko Ogiwara
Art by Haruhiko Momokawa

Volume 2

Story so far in

THE GOOD WITCH OF THE WEST™

In the kingdom of Graal, the Star Queen Astraea's daughters are raised as fosterlings, never knowing their parents' faces in exchange for the chance to one day inherit a mighty kingdom.

In the remote highlands of Sera Field, bright and energetic Firiel Dee enjoyed a happy childhood, not knowing she was the daughter of the lost Princess Edilene. However, the very reason that she had been raised by her recluse father, the astronomer Professor Dee, with his young apprentice Rune as her only friend, was because her parents had been exiled for their forbidden relationship.

Firiel's ignorance ends one day when Adale and Eusis Roland, children of the nearby Count of Rualgo, recognize an unusual stone in her necklace for what it is: a Queen's Kinship Stone, proof of Firiel's royal lineage.

But when Firiel returns home to hear the truth from her father's lips, she finds he has fled, and mysterious black-cloaked men are searching for Rune. Firiel finds him first, but instead of running away together, Rune allows himself to be kidnapped so Firiel can escape...

Main Characters

Firiel

Rune

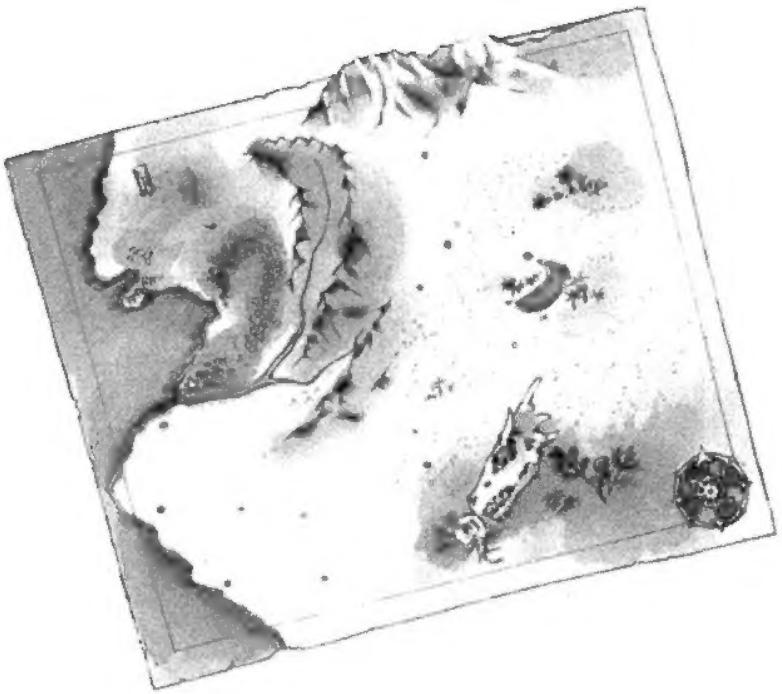
Adale

Eusis

Professor Dee

Lot

Tabitha and
Bo Holy



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IT WAS LIKE HE HAD BECOME SOMEONE I'D NEVER KNOWN BEFORE.
HE DIDN'T EVEN HESITATE.
HE JUST REACHED OUT AND TOOK THAT INTRUDER'S EAR RIGHT OFF WITH ONE QUICK SLICE.
AND HERE I'D THOUGHT OF HIM AS A QUIET, BOOKISH LITTLE BROTHER. ONE WHO ALWAYS NEEDED SOMEBODY TO LOOK AFTER HIM.

Chapter 5: Where Have the Little Goats Gone? (Part 2)

flying Swallow Castle
ADALE!
I HEARD FIRIEL DEE WAS HERE! IS THAT TRUE?
YES, EUSIS. SHE IS IN THE PARLOR AT THE MOMENT, BEING TENDED BY THE NURSE.
SHE'S HURT?!
YES. IT SEEMS SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAPPENED TO HER AT SERA FIELD.
I WAS RIDING AND SHE STUMBLED OUT IN FRONT OF ME, HER CLOTHING ALL IN TATTERS.

"I BEG YOU, LADY ADALE-- HELP ME SAVE RUNE!"
MY LORD BROTHER!
YET, THE ONLY WORDS OUT OF HER MOUTH WERE PLEAS FOR HER FRIEND, THAT YOUNG MAN WE MET AT THE BALL.
JUST LOOK-ING AT HER... PAINED ME.
I...
I CANNOT JUST IGNORE HER!
I WANT HER TO STAY HERE WITH ME, UNDER THE PROTECTION OF HOUSE ROLAND!
IT TAKES MORE THAN HALF A DAY BY CARRIAGE TO TRAVEL HERE FROM SERA FIELD.
SHE CAME THE ENTIRE WAY ON FOOT, DESPITE HER INJURIES.

ADALE.
I KNOW.
SHE COULD VERY WELL BE NOTHING BUT A DANGER TO US.
BOTH HER PARENTS WERE HERETICS, CONDEMNED BY THE STAR QUEEN ASTRAEA HERSELF.
NOT ONLY THAT...
...IT WAS OUR OWN FATHER, THE COUNT OF RUALGO, WHO SECRETLY IMPRISONED THEM IN SERA FIELD.
IF THE OTHER QUEEN-IN-WAITING...
...LEANORA CHEVIAT, EVER FOUND OUT ABOUT HER, THEN MY SCHEMING ELDER SISTER...
...WOULD SURELY TAKE GREAT JOY IN TURNING FIRIEL AGAINST ME AND USING HER TO REMOVE ME FROM CONTEN-TION.
DO YOU THINK ME A FOOL FOR NURTURING THE SEEDS OF A SCANDAL RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE RACE FOR THE THRONE?
PERHAPS I AM.
BUT, I... I JUST CANNOT--

"MY LORD BROTHER..."
BUT THAT'S JUST THE WAY YOU ARE.
I'M VERY PROUD OF YOU, ADALE.

I HARDLY RECOGNIZE HER AS THE SAME LIVELY GIRL I SAW AT THE BALL.
AND IT'S ONLY BEEN DAYS.
...LORD EUSIS ...?
THE PATIENT'S CARE HAS BEEN SEEN TO, MY LORD, MY LADY.
FIRIEL, TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED. EVERYTHING.
WHAT ON EARTH HAPPENED?!

OH, HOW HORRIBLE!
YOU POOR THING!
SUCH SORROW IN SUCH A SHORT TIME...!
LADY ADALE...
SO HOLY'S SUSPICIOUS DEATH.
PROFESSOR DEE'S SUDDEN DISAPPEARANCE.
THE STRANGE MEN IN BLACK CLOAKS.
ALL WERE CONNECTED BY THE PROFESSOR'S EPHEMERIS.
FIRIEL.
HAVE YOU ANY IDEA WHAT THIS "EPHEMERIS" IS?

NO, MY LORD.
THE PROFESSOR NEVER SAID A WORD ABOUT HIS RESEARCH TO ANYONE BUT RUNE. NEVER.
NOT EVEN TO ME, HIS OWN DAUGHTER.
THAT'S WHY THOSE MEN TOOK RUNE.
WITH THE PROFESSOR GONE...
...RUNE IS NOW THE ONLY ONE WHO KNOWS ANYTHING ABOUT IT.
"ONCE THIS RESEARCH IS COMPLETE..."
"...IT WILL YIELD A REVELATION THAT WILL TURN THIS ENTIRE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN!"
IF AN ORGANIZATION WITH TRAITOROUS INTENTIONS HAS ACQUIRED THIS KNOWLEDGE...
...IT COULD CERTAINLY POSE A VERY SERIOUS THREAT TO OUR WHOLE COUNTRY.

RUNE WON'T TELL THEM A SINGLE THING ABOUT THE PROFESSOR'S RESEARCH! I KNOW HE WON'T!
THAT'S WHY I'M SO AFRAID FOR HIM!
WHO KNOWS WHAT THOSE AWFUL MEN WILL DO TO HIM WHEN HE REFUSES TO TELL THEM WHAT THEY WANT?!
THEY THOUGHT NOTHING OF HITTING HIM WHEN HE WAS TIED UP.
THEY COULD KILL HIM WITH AS LITTLE THOUGHT AS SQUISHING A BUG.

I WANT TO GET RUNE BACK!
PLEASE...!
YOU BELONG TO A POWERFUL NOBLE FAMILY-- CAN'T YOU USE YOUR INFLUENCE TO FIND OUT WHERE HE IS?
HE'S NOT ANYMORE !!
I THINK I UNDERSTAND WHY HE LET HIMSELF GET CAPTURED-- IT MEANT YOU COULD ESCAPE.
BUT SOMEHOW I WAS UNDER THE IMPRESSION HE USED TO BE ONE OF THEM.
HE...

"I PROMISE."
...HE PROMISED ME.
HE SAID THAT WE WOULD LIVE THROUGH THIS TOGETHER.
HE PROMISED THAT HE'D STAY WITH ME ALWAYS.
I DON'T CARE WHO SENT HIM TO THE PROFESSOR'S TOWER. I DON'T CARE WHY THEY WANTED HIM THERE.
IT DOESN'T MATTER! NONE OF IT!
RUNE AND I GREW UP TOGETHER!
I DON'T CARE WHAT HAPPENED IN HIS PAST.

RUNE IS RUNE.
HE'S PRECIOUS TO ME JUST THE WAY HE IS!
WE'VE ALWAYS BEEN TOGETHER.
HE'S MY ONLY...
"YOU'RE NOT ALONE, ADALE."
"I'M YOUR KNIGHT."
"I'LL ALWAYS BE BY YOUR SIDE."
MY LORD BROTHER ...

FIRIEL...
...IN THE NAME OF THE COUNT OF RUALGO, I WOULD LIKE TO FORMALLY REQUEST YOU LET US PLACE YOU UNDER THE PROTECTION OF THE ROLAND FAMILY.
I WILL PROTECT YOU MYSELF...
...SO THAT SUCH TRAGEDY CAN NEVER HAPPEN TO YOU AGAIN.
?!
I'M NOT LOOKING FOR HELP FOR ME...
N-NO... LORD EUSIS, THAT'S NOT IT.
I WANT TO SAVE RUNE...
FIRIEL, I'M SO SORRY.
FIRIEL, PLEASE BELIEVE ME...
...WHEN I SAY WE DEARLY WISH WE COULD DO WHAT YOU ASK OF US.
BUT...

...AS NOBLES, WE ARE FIRST AND FOREMOST THE LOYAL SERVANTS OF HER MAJESTY, THE STAR QUEEN ASTRAEA.
IF WE ARE TO OFFICIALLY INVOLVE THE COUNT'S PRIVATE ARMY...
...WE MUST DO SO WITH REASON ENOUGH TO AVOID BRINGING SHAME UPON EITHER THE ROLAND FAMILY NAME OR THAT OF HER MAJESTY.
THEN...
...YOU'RE SAYING...
...THAT RESCUING RUNE WOULD BE DISHONORABLE?
HER MAJESTY HAS VERY STRICT LAWS FORBIDDING HERESY.
YOUR FATHER WAS A HERETIC ...
...BUT YOU COULD EASILY PLEAD IGNORANCE OF THAT.
UNFORTUNATELY, RUNE IS DIFFERENT.

HE HAS BEEN TOO GREATLY TAINTED BY THE FORBIDDEN.
PLEASE...! DON'T THINK TOO BADLY OF MY LORD BROTHER.
HE IS A BRAVE KNIGHT, BUT THERE ARE SOME TIMES...
...WHEN THERE IS SIMPLY NOTHING HE CAN DO!

FORGIVE US FOR BEING UNABLE TO HELP.
FORGIVE US, FIRIEL.
PLEASE.
N-NO... THAT'S OKAY. YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE SORRY.
I MEAN, I'M THE ONE...
...WHO ASKED THE IM-POSSIBLE OF YOU.
BUT...
...I CAN'T GIVE UP, NOW!

BUT STILL! I'M BEGGING YOU!
IF I DO, RUNE WILL NEVER COME HOME AGAIN!
ISN'T THERE ANYTHING YOU CAN DO TO SAVE HIM?!
TO OTHER PEOPLE, RUNE MAY BE A HERETIC.
SOMEONE "PROPER" PEOPLE SHUN.
THE WORLD WOULDN'T NOTICE AT ALL IF HE WERE JUST TO DISAPPEAR.
BUT TO ME...
FIRIEL.
I'M BEGGING YOU!

MASTER BO'S GOING TO GO SELL THE LITTLE GOATS NOW.
DOESN'T SEEING THE KIDS GET SOLD MAKE YOU SAD?
WHEN ROY'S PUPPY TAM DIED, YOU CRIED LOTS.
AREN'T YOU GOING TO CRY?
NOPE! BECAUSE NONE OF THE KIDS HAVE NAMES.
AND TAM.
AND MISS AMY, THE GOAT WHO GIVES US MILK EVERY DAY.
IF THEY EVER WENT AWAY, I'D BE REALLY, REALLY SAD.
I DIDN'T NAME THEM...
...BECAUSE I KNEW THEY'D BE SOLD. SO I'M NOT SAD NOW.
OH.
...THAT MEANS IT'S VERY IMPORTANT TO YOU.
JUST LIKE ROY.
NAMES?
WHEN YOU GIVE A NAME TO SOME-THING...

I GUESS...
...I WAS JUST LIKE THOSE LAMBS GETTING SOLD, THEN...
... BEFORE.
...EVEN IF I DIED...NO ONE WOULD EVER NOTICE.
SO IF I WENT AWAY...
NO ONE EVER BOTHERED TO GIVE ME A NAME.
NO ONE WOULD EVER CRY.
RUNE DOESN'T HAVE A MOTHER OR A FATHER.
HE DOESN'T TALK ABOUT IT MUCH, BUT I KNOW SOME REALLY AWFUL THINGS HAPPENED TO HIM WHEN HE LIVED WITH THAT TROUPE.
BUT YOU DO HAVE A NAME NOW!
YOU'RE RUNE!
AND I'D CRY LOTS AND LOTS...
...IF YOU EVER WENT AWAY.

I'D BE REALLY SAD!
REALLY, REALLY, REALLY SUPER-DUPER SAD!
I BELIEVE YOU.
RUNE HARDLY EVER SMILED.
SO THE FEW TIMES HE DID...

...ARE IMAGES BURNED INTO MY MEMORY.
IF YOU COULD JUST FIND OUT WHERE HE IS, MY LORD, THAT WOULD BE ENOUGH!
THEN I COULD GO SAVE HIM MYSELF!
YOU WOULDN'T HAVE TO DO ANYTHING THAT WOULD BRING SHAME TO YOUR HONOR!
I KNOW THIS MAY BE HARD FOR YOU...
...BUT LISTEN TO ME.
YOU FORGET YOU BEAR THE BLOOD OF THE STAR QUEEN!
THAT YOU MANAGED TO ESCAPE BEFORE THOSE MEN DISCOVERED YOU WAS PURE LUCK!
HOLD ON, FIRIEL!
I CAN'T POSSIBLY LET YOU DO ANYTHING OF THE SORT!

IN ALMOST EVERY CASE...
UN-FORTU-NATELY ...
...THERE ARE MORE SECRET ORGANI-ZATIONS IN THIS COUNTRY THAN ANY-ONE CAN COUNT.
THEY HIDE THEM-SELVES IN THE SHADOWY PLACES, WHERE THE LIGHT OF THE STAR QUEEN CANNOT REACH.
WE HERE IN THE LIGHT CAN'T HOPE TO UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS THERE. WE HAVE NO WAY TO FIND OUT.
CONSUMED ...?
...THOSE PULLED INTO THAT DARKNESS ARE CONSUMED BY IT.

MY LORD, I APOLOGIZE FOR DEMANDING SOMETHING UNREASON-ABLE.
WHERE ARE YOU GOING?!
BUT RUNE IS PART OF MY FAMILY.
I MUST SAVE HIM.

LET ME GO!
PLEASE, LORD BROTHER!
YOU MUSTN'T LET FIRIEL GO!
MY LORD...? L-LET ME GO.
HE RISKED HIS LIFE TO SAVE YOURS! WOULD YOU LET HIS SACRIFICE BE FOR NOTHING?!
IF YOU GO AFTER HIM ALONE, YOU WILL LOSE YOUR LIFE!
DON'T YOU UNDER-STAND?!

IF KEEPING MY LIFE MEANS RUNE HAS TO LOSE HIS, NO! I WON'T LET THAT HAPPEN!
YES, HE RISKED HIS LIFE FOR ME.
MEANING IT'S ONLY RIGHT I DO THE SAME FOR HIM!
SO PLEASE! STAND ASIDE AND LET ME PASS!
NO!

HIS WORDS SOUNDED LIKE A JUDGE'S FINAL DECREE.
THE LAST SMALL ROCK OF HOPE I CLUNG TO WAS CRUMBLING....
RUNE WAS NEVER COMING BACK.
AND I...
...WAS TRULY ALONE.
WAAA

IF IT TRULY WORRIES YOU THAT MUCH...
...THEN I'LL SEE WHAT I CAN DO.

PLEASE.
DON'T CRY.

MY LORD BROTHER...
I PROMISE YOU, I'LL FIND A WAY TO SAVE YOUR FRIEND.
...HE'S BEEN TRAINED TO BE THE EPITOME OF KNIGHTHOOD.
HIS ENTIRE LIFE...
SO PLEASE...
...STOP CRYING.
LORD EUSIS...
THAT HE WOULD CHOOSE TO ENDANGER HIS HONOR AND THE ROLAND FAMILY NAME FOR PERSONAL REASONS IS...!

ALL RIGHT! OUT WITH IT, EUSIS! CONFESS!
YOU HAVE SPECIAL FEELINGS FOR THAT LITTLE WILDFLOWER FROM THE BALL.
AM I WRONG?
I'M NOT THE MASTER COURTIER YOU ARE, AND I DON'T WISH TO BE!
I'VE NEVER HEARD ONE JUICY TIDBIT ABOUT YOU AND A GIRL, NOT EVEN WHEN WE WERE SCHOOL-MATES.
I'VE BEEN TERRIBLY WORRIED ABOUT YOU, YOU KNOW.
LOT...
I ALWAYS WONDERED WHAT KIND OF GIRL WOULD EVER MANAGE TO CATCH YOUR ATTENTION, BUT NEVER IN A MILLION YEARS DID I IMAGINE IT WOULD BE ONE WITH SUCH... HISTORY.
YOU'RE A THRILL-SEEKER, AREN'T YOU?
WELL, YOU HAVE MY FULL AND UNWAVERING SUPPORT!

I ADMIT, I DO HAVE SPECIAL FEELINGS FOR HER.
!
BUT NOT IN THE WAY YOU'RE THINKING, LOT.
HOWEVER ...
...I HAVE NO INTENTION OF TAKING A WIFE OR MISTRESS. EVER.

WELL, NOW!
IS THAT THE DECLARATION OF A FUTURE ROYAL KNIGHT...?
EUSIS, YOU--
?!
?!
IT'S BEEN FIVE DAYS.
WHAT ON EARTH ARE YOU WAITING FOR?
LORD BROTHER...
DO YOU HAVE A MOMENT?

NOTHING. I'VE ALREADY MADE WHAT ADVANCE-MENTS I CAN.
I'VE ALSO ALREADY RECEIVED SEVERAL REPORTS.
I SEE. BUT THIS IS YOU WE ARE SPEAKING OF, MY LORD.
HAVEN'T YOU ALREADY A FAIRLY GOOD IDEA WHO IS BEHIND IT ALL?
I HAVE MADE SOME INQUIRIES OF MY OWN, AS WELL.
I'VE LEARNED OF AN ORGANI-ZATION THAT CALLS ITS LEADER "MASTER."
IF THE ANSWER I HAVE UNCOVERED IS THE SAME AS YOURS, MY LORD...
...IT COULDN'T BE ANY WORSE.
THE DEEPEST DARKNESS IN ALL OF GRAAL...
...HIS CASTLE...

SUCH A STUBBORN BOY.
WHY DO YOU RESIST?
YOU ALREADY BEAR THE MARK OF OUR ORDER ON YOUR SOUL...
...NOW YOU'LL WEAR IT ON YOUR FLESH.

Chapter 6: Star's Gravity

WELL, THIS WILL NOT DO AT ALL!
SHALL I HAVE A LIGHTER SOUP PREPARED?
I'M SORRY, MY LADY. I'M JUST... NOT HUNGRY.
WILL YOU NOT TAKE EVEN A SINGLE BITE OF FOOD AGAIN TODAY?
FIRIEL?
SUCH RICH, DELICIOUS FOOD...
I WONDER HOW HUNGRY RUNE IS RIGHT NOW...

ARE YOU SERIOUS ABOUT THIS, YOUNG MASTER?
ポリ…
GOING SO FAR AS TO INVOLVE BARON CHRISBARD...
OH, DON'T BE SUCH A STICK-IN-THE-MUD. JUST HELP THE MAN, ALL RIGHT?
SIR CAPTAIN.
♡
IT CAN'T BE HELPED. THERE IS NO OTHER WAY.
ガッ
FIRE!!

I'M AFRAID I CANNOT.
DEPLOYING THE COUNT'S PRIVATE ARMY WHEN HE ISN'T PRESENT IS UNTHINKABLE ENOUGH.
BUT TO USE THEM TO STRIKE HERE, OF ALL PLACES?
IN HIS ABSENCE, FATHER ENTRUSTED COMMAND OF THE ROLAND FAMILY'S PRIVATE ARMY TO YOU.
SO, I ASK YOU TO PERMIT ME THEIR USE.
THAT'S THE STAR QUEEN'S PRESERVE! THE PRIVATE RESIDENCES OF THE FAMILY ARE THERE.
IF ANYTHING WERE TO GO WRONG, WE WOULD IMMEDIATELY BE LABELED TRAITORS TO THE THRONE!

GOOD SIR CAPTAIN...
...IF YOU MUST KNOW...
LOT!!
...EUSIS' BUDDING LOVE LIFE DEPENDS ON THIS.
COME QUICKLY! FIRIEL IS...!
LORD BROTHER!
FIRIEL IS A VERY SINGLE-MINDED INDIVIDUAL.
AND SHE IS FAR, FAR MORE EMOTIONAL THAN ONE WOULD GUESS SIMPLY BY LOOKING AT HER.
NOT PRECISELY.
IS SHE ILL?

NO ONE KNOWS WHERE SIR RUNE IS...
...NOR WHAT TERRIBLE THINGS ARE HAPPENING TO HIM. YET HERE SHE SITS, IN SAFETY AND LUXURY.
SHE FEELS HORRIBLY GUILTY ABOUT HER COMFORTABLE CONDITION. IT TORMENTS HER HEART SO MUCH THAT IT HAS EVEN BEGUN TO POISON HER BODY.
I DON'T WANT TO LOSE HER!
SHE IS EXACTLY LIKE A HEROINE IN ONE OF MY STORIES.
HOW MANY OTHER PEOPLE IN THE WORLD CARE SO INTENSELY FOR OTHERS? A HANDFUL? FEWER?
SHE FEELS IT SO STRONGLY SHE'S MADE HERSELF DEATHLY ILL.

MY LORD BROTHER, PLEASE!
YOU MUST SAVE SIR RUNE AS SOON AS YOU POSSIBLY CAN, OR WE MAY VERY WELL LOSE FIRIEL ALSO!
"FIRIEL..."
DID SOMEONE JUST CALL ME?

AAA...
FIRIEL...?!
WHAT ON EARTH ARE YOU DOING AT THE MANOR, CHILD?
I THOUGHT THOSE MEN HAD GOTTEN YOU!
MADAM TABITHA!!

LORD EUSIS WENT UP TO SERA FIELD AND CHECKED, AND HE SAID THERE WAS ONLY ONE BODY IN THE RUBBLE!
I KNEW YOU WERE STILL ALIVE, MADAM TABITHA!
I KNEW IT!
I KNOW.
THOSE MEN TOOK HIM AWAY!
BUT RUNE'S GONE.
THAT NIGHT...
...THOSE BLACK-CLOAKED MEN CAME TO THE HOUSE AND SET FIRE TO IT.
BUT I ESCAPED OUT THE BACK DOOR.
I FOLLOWED THEM ON BO'S OLD HORSE.
I FIGURED IF I KNEW WHERE THEIR LAIR WAS, I COULD GO TO HIS LORDSHIP THE COUNT AND BEG HIM TO GET YOU BOTH BACK.
I FOLLOWED THEM TO A MANOR HOUSE IN THE SPRUCE FOREST.
I SAW THEM GO INSIDE IT WITH MY OWN EYES.
THAT'S WHERE THEY'VE GOT RUNE, NO DOUBT ABOUT IT!

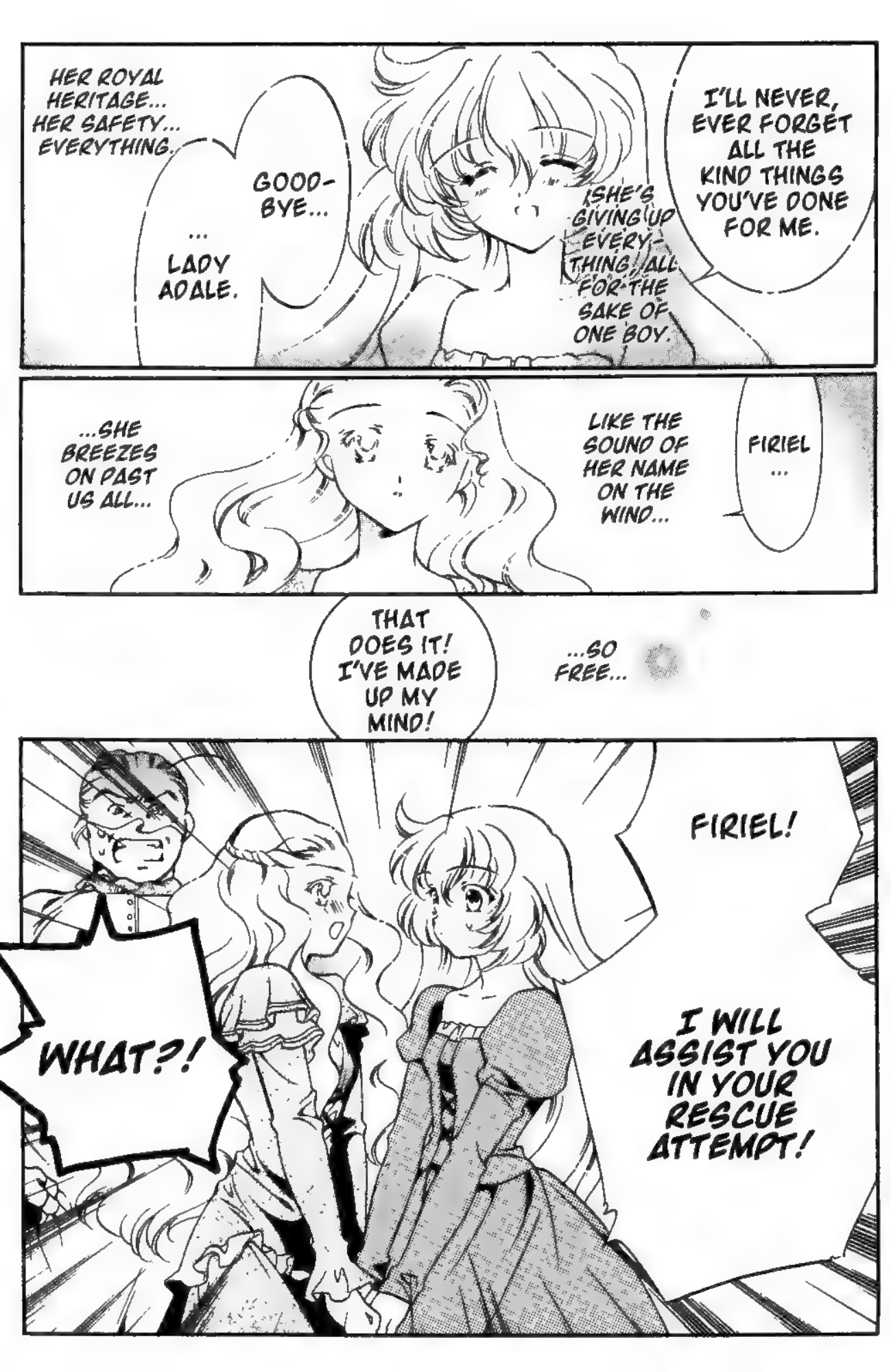
WOW!
MADAM TABITHA, YOU'RE AMAZING!
YOU'RE LIKE THE SMART MOTHER GOAT IN THE FAIRY TALE.
THE ONE WHO TRICKS THE WOLF AND CUTS HER CHILDREN OUT OF ITS BELLY!
...WHAT?
OH, THANK THE STARS!
YOU SHOULD GO SEE LORD EUSIS AND TELL HIM EVERY-THING!
NOW WE CAN GO SAVE RUNE!

MADAM TABITHA, STOP THAT!
WELL...
...IT SEEMS THOSE BLACK-CLOAKED MEN ARE HIDING OUT IN THE MANOR OF A REALLY IMPORTANT, POWERFUL NOBLE.
WHMP OHUU MEENPT WE CNMPHT OHU AMFOHMPHG?
(WHAT DO YOU MEAN, WE CAN'T DO ANYTHING?)
WHMP NPHT?!
(WHY NOT?)
THE YOUNG MASTER WAS REALLY MOST GRACIOUS AND LISTENED SO VERY CAREFULLY TO WHAT I SAID...
...BUT THE CAPTAIN WAS AGAINST THE WHOLE IDEA.
I UNDER-STAND HIS REASONS, THOUGH.
IT PROBABLY ISN'T RIGHT THAT THE ENTIRE ROLAND FAMILY PUT THEMSELVES IN DANGER JUST TO RESCUE A SINGLE PEASANT BOY LIKE RUNE.

...I WAS SO HAPPY WHEN YOU SAID THAT.
I TRUSTED YOU. BUT...
LORD EUSIS...
I PROMISE YOU, I'LL FIND A WAY TO SAVE YOUR FRIEND.
DON'T DO IT!
F-FIRIEL!
!
Yikes!

I'M NOT WAITING ANY LONGER.
NOT WHEN RUNE MIGHT BE KILLED AT ANY MINUTE.
LORD EUGIS AND THE OTHER NOBLES MAY NOT BE ABLE TO DO ANY-THING ...
... BUT YOU AND I DON'T HAVE A REPUTA-TION TO PROTECT.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO! I KNOW THAT LOOK. IT MEANS YOU'RE THINKING OF DOING SOMETHING PREPOS-TEROUS!
DON'T DO WHAT? I HAVEN'T SAID ANYTHING YET.
Why the death grip?!
COME WITH ME, MADAM TABITHA. PLEASE.
WE'LL GO GET RUNE BACK BY OURSELVES!
ク...

FIRIEL.
WE...
WE'VE LOST YOUR TRUST, HAVEN'T WE?
YOU'VE DONE SO MUCH FOR ME, MY LADY.
I REALLY AM VERY GRATE-FUL.
THANK YOU. BUT...
...I CAN'T ABAN-DON RUNE.
RIGHT NOW, THIS VERY MINUTE, HE'S WAITING FOR ME TO COME RESCUE HIM.
IT'S NOT SOMETHING I NEEDED ANYWAY.
YOU CAN HAVE THIS NECKLACE BACK.
FIRIEL...
BESIDES, IF I KEEP IT, YOUR LADYSHIP AND LORD EUSIS AND THE REST OF YOUR FAMILY MIGHT GET IN TROUBLE.


HER ROYAL HERITAGE... HER SAFETY... EVERYTHING.
GOOD-BYE...
...LADY ADALE.
I'LL NEVER, EVER FORGET ALL THE KIND THINGS YOU'VE DONE FOR ME.
SHE'S GIVING UP EVERY-THING, ALL FOR THE SAKE OF ONE BOY.
...SHE BREEZES ON PAST US ALL...
LIKE THE SOUND OF HER NAME ON THE WIND...
FIRIEL ...
THAT DOES IT! I'VE MADE UP MY MIND!
...SO FREE...
FIRIEL!
WHAT?!
I WILL ASSIST YOU IN YOUR RESCUE ATTEMPT!

Ah he he!
OH, COME NOW, MRS. HOLY. IT'S NOT SO BAD.
I HAVE BEEN A GREAT HELP ALREADY, HAVE I NOT? WHO ELSE COULD HAVE ARRANGED A CART AND COSTUMES SO STEALTHILY?
WHY DID IT HAVE TO TURN OUT THIS WAY? WHY?
Sigh...
ON THE OUTSIDE SHE LOOKS LIKE A FAIRY-TALE PRINCESS, ALL SWEET AND PRETTY LIKE SUGAR CANDY.
BUT ON THE INSIDE, I'M STARTING TO THINK SHE'S VERY DIFFERENT.
I'VE ALWAYS BEEN QUITE GOOD AT THINKING ON MY FEET.
ALLOWING ME TO ACCOMPANY YOU GREATLY INCREASES OUR CHANCES OF SUCCESS.
LADY ADALE...

...HOW COME YOU'RE DOING ALL THIS FOR US?
LADY ADALE...
...PLEASE, FIRIEL, WON'T YOU CALL ME JUST "ADALE"?
I'VE ASKED YOU SO MANY TIMES ALREADY, BUT...
Sigh...
M-MY LADY! I-I COULON'T POSSIBLY! I MEAN, YOU'RE SO...SO...
A QUEEN-IN-WAITING IS ALWAYS KEPT APART. NOTHING CAN BE DONE ABOUT IT, REALLY.
IT IS PART OF HER FATE.
DO YOU KNOW HOW LONELY THAT IS?
WE BOTH SHARE THE BLOOD OF THE STAR QUEEN...
...BUT YOU STILL SEE ME AS BEING VERY DIFFERENT, DON'T YOU FIRIEL?

A QUEEN-IN-WAITING'S FATE...?
BUT...
...WELL...
...DON'T YOU HAVE LORD EUSIS, MY LADY?
MY LORD BROTHER IS THE ELDEST SON OF THE ROLAND FAMILY. AS SUCH, HE WAS BORN TO BE THE STAR QUEEN'S KNIGHT.
IF, ALL THOSE YEARS AGO...
...THE ROLAND FAMILY HAD CHOSEN TO TAKE IN NOT ME, BUT A DIFFERENT QUEEN-IN-WAITING, SUCH AS MY ELDER SISTER LEANDRA, OR EVEN YOU...
THAT IS THE WAY OF THE KNIGHTS.
...MY LORD BROTHER WOULD DEDICATE HIS LIFE TO HER WITH EXACTLY THE SAME UNQUESTIONING DEVOTION HE NOW SHOWS TO ME.

I HAVE WHAT I HAVE ONLY BECAUSE OF MY ROYAL HERITAGE.
I KNOW MOTHER AND FATHER LOVE ME.
I'M... JEALOUS OF YOU, FIRIEL.
THE ONLY VALUE I HAVE IS THE BLOOD IN MY VEINS.
BUT YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES ARE DIFFERENT. YOU CAN LIVE AND ACT FOR YOUR RUNE AS YOU WISH.
BUT WOULD THEY CARE AS MUCH IF I DID NOT CARRY THE BLOOD OF THE STAR QUEEN?
HE HAS NO PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO ME.

I WANTED TO TRY LIVING LIKE YOU DO.
LIKE ME?
YES. BECAUSE I ADMIRE YOU, FIRIEL.
WH-WHAT?
ADMIRE ME?!
A GRAND PERSON LIKE YOUR LADYSHIP? H-HOW?
I WANTED TO TRY LIVING LIKE YOU DO.
IF ONLY FOR A LITTLE WHILE.

THIS IS THE PLACE, GIRLS.
SOMEWHERE IN THIS CASTLE...
...RUNE'S BEING HELD PRISONER.
LET'S GO, MADAM TABITHA.
LADY ADALE, WAIT HERE WITH THE CART, OKAY?
NO, FIRIEL. IT IS YOU WHO MUST STAY HERE.

SO BE A GOOD GIRL AND STAY HERE WITH THE CART, OKAY? BE READY TO RUN AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE.
BUT... THIS WAS MY IDEA!
I DON'T WANT TO STAY HERE!
ACCORDINGLY, ONLY MRS. HOLY AND MYSELF SHOULD SNEAK IN, POSING AS SERVANTS.
... YOU STILL HAVEN'T COMPLETELY RECOVERED FROM YOUR ILLNESS.
HER LADYSHIP IS RIGHT, FIRIEL. BESIDES ...
HUH? WHY?
てたてた
YOU FORGET SOME-THING.
THESE MEN HAVE ALREADY SEEN YOUR FACE. THEY KNOW YOU.
FIRIEL.
IF HER LADYSHIP GETS HURT BECAUSE OF IT, I...!
...CALL ME "ADALE," WOULD YOU?
WHEN WE RETURN WITH RUNE...
...PLEASE ...
BUT...!
YES, MY LADY.
LET'S GO!

?!
KYAAAAAA!!!

FIRIEL !!
LET HER LADYSHIP GO!!
SHE'S BEING TAKEN AWAY.
JUST LIKE RUNE WAS.
ALL BECAUSE SHE WANTED TO HELP ME.
.....
NO!!
ADALE!!

DON'T YOU DARE DO ANYTHING MEAN TO ADALE!!
OW!
YOU LET GO OF HER RIGHT NOW!
ADALE!!
FIRIEL! CALM DOWN!
HUH?
THAT VOICE...

BE QUIET!
WHAT ON EARTH?!
DAYS SPENT WAITING FOR THE PERFECT OPPORTUNITY...
...HOURS SPENT SECURING THE PERIMETER OF THE CASTLE...
...ALL NEARLY RUINED BY THE THREE OF YOU AT THE VERY LAST MINUTE!
WHAT IN THE WORLD WERE YOU THINKING?!
EXPLAIN YOURSELF, ADALE ROLAND!!

DID YOU HAVE EVEN THE SLIGHTEST IDEA JUST HOW MUCH DANGER YOU WERE PUTTING YOURSELF INTO?
IT WAS NECESSARY THAT I PROVE TO HER, THROUGH MY ACTIONS ...
I...
I JUST WISHED TO REGAIN FIRIEL'S TRUST.
...THAT I WAS WILLING TO DO ABSOLUTELY ANYTHING TO HELP HER.
I THOUGHT THAT THE WAY THINGS WERE GOING, SHE WOULD CLOSE HER HEART TO US COMPLETELY.
BUT THE RESULT WAS WORTH IT!
DID YOU NOT HEAR HER?

BE-SIDES ...
...I WASN'T VERY WORRIED ABOUT WHAT MIGHT HAVE HAPPENED.
RIGHT?
FIRIEL FINALLY CALLED ME JUST "ADALE."
I KNEW THAT IF ANYTHING HORRIBLE REALLY DID HAPPEN TO ME, YOU WOULD COME CHARGING TO MY RESCUE, ALL IN A HUFF. AND YOU DID!
Bwa ha ha! Har har! Ha ha ha!
PRINCESS... YOU ARE UNBELIEVABLE.

FIRIEL DEE!!!
WHAT IS YOUR EXPLA-NATION FOR THIS?
ADALE MAY HAVE SAID THAT...
"IF IT WASN'T FOR MY ROYAL BLOOD..."
Heh
YOU FAINTED JUST THE OTHER DAY! WHAT DID YOU POSSIBLY THINK YOU COULD DO IN YOUR CONDITION ?!
Eep!
...BUT THEY REALLY DO ACT LIKE BROTHER AND SISTER, SHE AND LORD EUSIS.
DID YOU REALLY TRUST ME SO LITTLE?!

HE SOUNDS SO DIS-APPOINTED.
KIND OF LIKE A HURT LITTLE BOY.
JUST BECAUSE I DIDN'T TRUST HIM?

"FIRIEL FINALLY CALLED ME JUST 'ADALE.'"
MY WORDS REALLY DO REACH THEM.
BUT...
...IF THAT WERE TRUE, HE WOULDN'T LOOK SO WOUNDED.
I THOUGHT THEY LIVED TOO DIFFERENTLY FROM PEOPLE LIKE ME.
I THOUGHT THEY WOULDN'T CARE ABOUT A PROMISE MADE TO SOME PEASANT GIRL.
THAT THEY'D BREAK IT WITHOUT A SECOND THOUGHT.
THEY CAN RING IN THE HEARTS OF NOBLES...
I'LL SAY IT ONE MORE TIME.
TRUST ME, FIRIEL.
I...
I'M SO SORRY!!

...JUST THE WAY THEIRS DO...
YES!
...IN MINE.
WELL, WELL.
NEVER HAVE I MET SUCH DELIGHTFUL INTERLOPERS.
Oh ho!

SWEET AND INNOCENT...
...YET BRAVE AND FEISTY...
...AND NOT TO MENTION QUITE LOVELY TO LOOK AT. THEY MAKE WONDERFUL PRINCESSES. DON'T YOU AGREE, YOUNG MASTER?
JUST WHO WOULD WANT TO BE A KNIGHT TO PRINCESSES LIKE THAT?
BUT PRINCESSES WHO WILLINGLY THROW THEMSELVES INTO DANGER?
CAPTAIN!
...WILLFUL WOMEN WHO CONSTANTLY KEEP MEN ON THEIR TOES AND OCCASIONALLY MAKE FOOLS OF THEM ARE FAR MORE ENTERTAINING!
BESIDES, COMPARED TO SIMPERING PRINCESSES WHO QUIETLY WAIT TO BE RESCUED...
Ha ha ha!
WELL, GRAAL IS THE COUNTRY OF THE STAR QUEEN, AFTER ALL. THERE'S NO HELPING IT.
Hmh.

WELL, MY LORD, WE'D HEARD THAT WE'D BE RESCUING SOME HERETIC BOY...
...SO NONE OF US WERE REALLY ALL THAT GUNG HO.
BUT AFTER WHAT JUST HAPPENED, WE ALL UNDERSTAND THAT--WHILE NOT DIRECTLY--WE'RE REALLY SAVING THOSE TWO Pprincesses.
WE ARE READY TO ADVANCE AT ANY TIME.
EVERY-ONE IS IN POSITION, SIR!
WHAT'S THIS? YOU SEEM FAR MORE ENTHUSIASTIC THAN BEFORE.
WE AWAIT YOUR ORDERS, SIR!
AHA. JUST THE NATURE OF SOLDIERS, I SEE.
IF YOU ARE GOING TO BE SAVING SOMEBODY FROM THE CLUTCHES OF EVIL, YOU'D RATHER IT BE A LOVELY MAIDEN, CORRECT?
Ah-ha-ha!
Ha ha ha!
YES, MY LORD!

FIRIEL AND ADALE...
...HAS FINALLY BEGUN TO MOVE.
THIS SITUATION, ONCE HOPELESSLY DEADLOCKED...
...JUST BY BEING HERE...
...YOU HAVE MOVED SO MANY MEN.
OF THE MANY STRANGE POWERS ROYAL DAUGHTERS ARE SAID TO POSSESS...
THEY GRAB THE ATTENTION AND THE ADORATION OF EVERYONE AROUND THEM, UNAWARE OF THEIR POWER...
...CHARISMA IS CLEARLY ONE.
...LIKE THE GRAVITY OF A POWERFUL STAR.
I KNEW ADALE HAD THAT GIFT.
BUT NOW FIRIEL...
WAS SHE BORN WITH IT, TOO?

FOR THE SAKE OF THE FAIR MAIDEN I HELD IN THESE ARMS...
...I'LL UNDER-TAKE THIS MISSION AS HAPPILY AS THE NEXT MAN!
IF SO...
YOUNG MASTER, IF YOU PLEASE ...
GIVE THE ORDER!
...WHAT KIND OF CHANGE...
MEN! WE CANNOT GIVE THE ENEMY A CHANCE TO REALIZE WHO WE ARE.
SO WE STRIKE HARD AND WE STRIKE NOW!
FORWARD!!
...WOULD SHE BRING TO OUR WORLD?

Chapter 7: Rescue

WHO'S THERE?!
TWO TO STAND WATCH BY THE MOAT.
THREE OVER THE WEST WALL.
FOUR MEN FROM THE BACK.
THOSE ARE YOUR POSITIONS. ANY QUESTIONS?
GARLAND AND I...
...TAKE THE FRONT DOOR.

WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, YOUNG MASTER, IT IS HIGHLY UNUSUAL FOR THE COMMANDER TO ACCOMPANY HIS MEN ON A CHARGE. DOUBLY SO TO ENTER THROUGH THE FRONT DOOR.
I PROMISED FIRIEL.
I TOLD HER I WOULD SAVE THE PROFESSOR'S APPRENTICE WITH MY OWN HANDS.
I WILL NOT GO BACK ON MY WORD.
...HE'S UNFAILINGLY LOYAL...
...AS TRUSTWORTHY AND FAITHFUL AS A FAIRY-TALE HERO.
...HE IS STILL TERRIBLY YOUNG.
YOU HAVE CONFIDENCE IN YOUR SKILLS, AFTER ALL.
?!!
HOWEVER...
.....
AS YOU WISH.

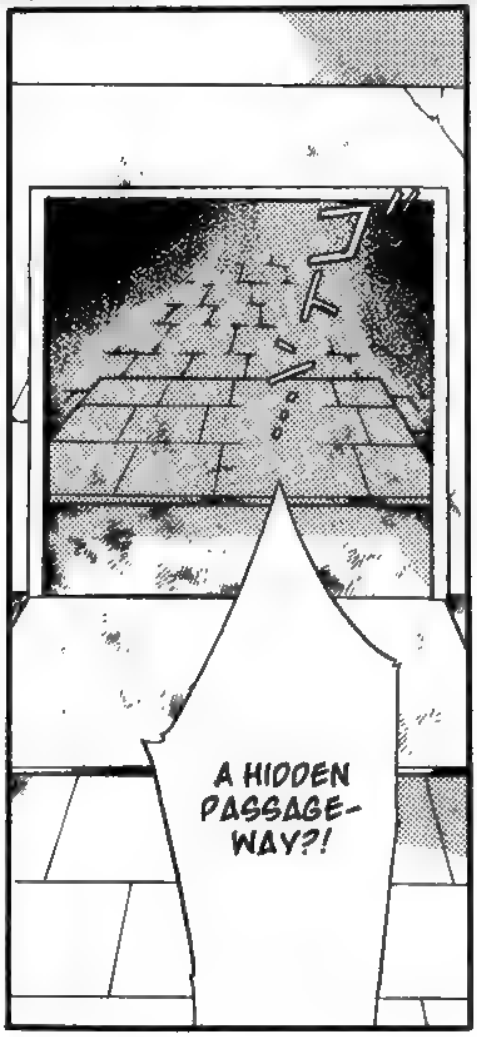
TALK!
WHERE ARE YOU HOLDING THE BOY FROM SERA FIELD?
I-IN THE...
...HIGH TOWER ROOM...!

THIS ROOM GIVES ME THE CREEPS.
WHAT IN THE WORLD ARE THESE DOO-DADS?
THAT SYMBOL!
!
"HERMES."

GARLAND.
THAT IS A NAME THAT MUST NEVER BE MENTIONED IN THIS COUNTRY.
PUT IT OUT OF YOUR MIND.
REMEMBER, OUR MISSION IS RESCUING THE BOY.
...YES.
"THE CIRCLE OF HERMES."
THE LARGEST UNDERGROUND ORGANIZATION IN ALL GRAAL.
IT IS SAID THEY ARE A GROUP OF RESEARCHERS WHO HAVE LEFT THE PATH OF LIGHT TO PURSUE KNOWLEDGE THE STAR QUEEN HAS FORBIDDEN.
THE STAR QUEEN ASTRAEA HAS SWORN TO EXTERMINATE THEM TO A MAN.
TO FIND THEIR SYMBOL HERE OF ALL PLACES...

PRINCE LIAMON, DUKE OF RIEZ, THE ONLY BOY THE STAR QUEEN--HER MAJESTY QUEEN CONSTANCE-- EVER BORE...
...WHAT IS THIS SYMBOL DOING IN HIS PRIVATE RESIDENCE?
BUT THERE ARE SIGNS THAT SOMEONE WAS HERE UNTIL VERY RECENTLY. IT'S ALMOST AS IF THEY...
...DISAPPEARED IN A PUFF OF SMOKE.
THE ENTIRE TOWER IS DESERTED, MY LORD.
HE'S NOT HERE?!

DAMN!
ONCE ON THE LAKE OUT BACK, THEY COULD EASILY ESCAPE ACROSS THE BORDER.
THEN RUNE WILL BE BEYOND OUR REACH FOR GOOD!

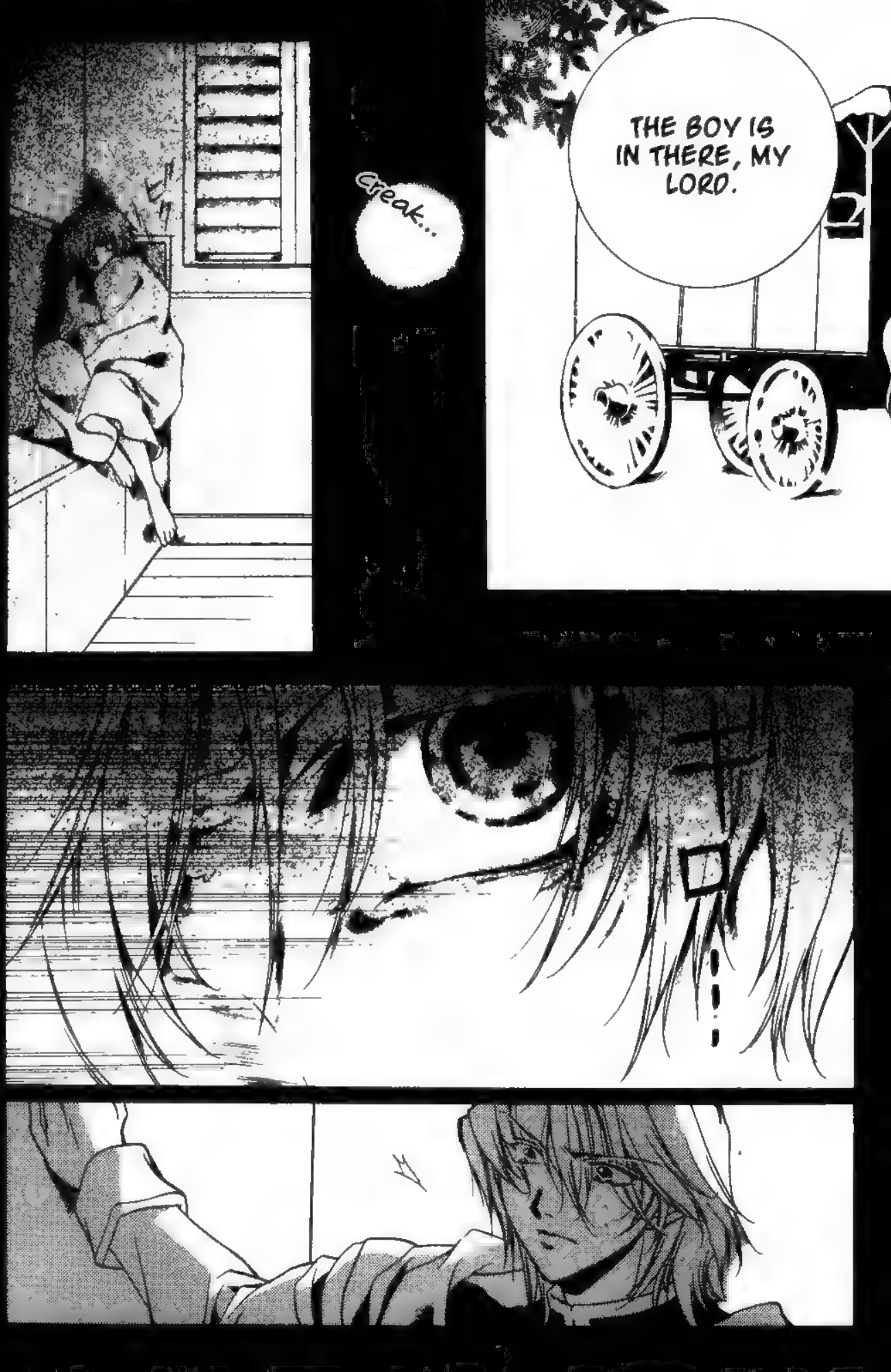

A HIDDEN PASSAGE-WAY?!

THERE IS NO NEED TO WORRY, YOUNG MASTER.
I TOOK THE LIBERTY OF STATIONING SOME MEN BY THE LAKE AHEAD OF TIME.

CAP-TAIN!
HOW DID IT GO, ALEN?
PER-FECTLY, SIR!
THEY CAME THIS WAY IN A CARRIAGE, NOT SUSPECT-ING A THING. WE SURPRISED THEM BUT GOOD!
THEN ALL IT TOOK WAS A COUPLE OF THREATS, SIR, AND THEY LEFT THE HOSTAGE BEHIND AND RAN.
WE TRIED OUR BEST TO MAKE IT LOOK LIKE A SIMPLE BANDIT ATTACK...
I BELIEVE I ADVISED YOU AT THE BEGINNING, YOUNG MASTER...
...BUT ALL OF US BEING REFINED GENTLEMEN AT HEART, I CAN'T SAY AS IF THEY BELIEVED US OR NOT, SIR.
OF COURSE! A REFINED COMMANDER MEANS REFINED MEN!

A COMMANDER SHOULD ALWAYS HOLD BACK, TAKING POSITION WHERE HE CAN SEE THE ENTIRE FIELD OF BATTLE.
HAD YOU FOLLOWED THAT ADVICE ...
...THEN PERHAPS YOU WOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO SAVE THE HOSTAGE WITH YOUR OWN HANDS, AS YOU WISHED.
IN THE END...
IF GARLAND HADN'T BEEN HERE...
...IF HE HADN'T COVERED MY MISTAKE, THEN...
STILL, FOR YOUR FIRST BATTLE, I'D SAY THIS WENT EXTRAORDINARILY WELL.
THERE ISN'T A MAN HERE WHO WOULD QUESTION YOUR BRAVERY.
...IT WASN'T REALLY ME WHO WAS IN COMMAND AT ALL, WAS IT?

AH, I SEE.
YOU WANTED TO DO IT YOURSELF, DIDN'T YOU? YOU WANTED TO BE THE ONE TO "ACCIDENTALLY" ALLOW THE CORNERED ENEMY TO ESCAPE.
.....
IT WOULD BE VERY UNWISE FOR THE ROLANDS TO GIVE THE DUKE OF LIEZ ANY EXCUSE TO HOLD A GRUDGE.
THE GOOD CAPTAIN TOOK UP THAT ROLE FOR YOU, YOU KNOW.
YOU CANNOT AFFORD TO EXPOSE THEIR DARK SIDE.
EUSIS, YOU SHOULD REMAIN THE PERFECT ROYAL KNIGHT, YOUR HONOR SPOTLESS.
WE WANT YOU TO WALK ONLY THE BRIGHTEST OF SUN-LIT PATHS IN LIFE.
BECAUSE WE ARE ALL VERY FOND OF YOU, AFTER ALL.


THE BOY IS IN THERE, MY LORD.
Creak...

YOU DON'T LOOK TERRIBLY PLEASED ABOUT BEING RESCUED.
"RESCUED"? HA!
THIS IS NO "RESCUE" TO ME.
NOTHING'S CHANGED. YOU'RE EXACTLY THE SAME AS THEM. THE ONLY DIFFERENCE...
...IS WHO'S HOLDING THE OTHER END OF MY CHAINS.
WELL THAT WAS A HEARTFELT "THANK YOU," I'M SURE.
YOU KNOW...

...EVERY-ONE WORRIED SO MUCH ABOUT HIM AND WORKED SO HARD TO RESCUE HIM.
FIRIEL... ADALE...
...EVER SINCE WE MET AT THE BALL.
...THIS BOY HAS SPELLED NOTHING BUT UNPLEASANT EXPERIENCES FOR ME...
IT FEELS LIKE HE'S TAKING ALL OUR HARD WORK...
...AND SPITTING ON IT.
WE DID IT BECAUSE FIRIEL ASKED US TO.
LET ME MAKE ONE THING PERFECTLY CLEAR. WE DID NOT GO THROUGH ALL OF THIS FOR YOUR SAKE.

FIRIEL...?
YES, FIRIEL.
SHE IS CURRENTLY UNDER THE ROLANDS' PROTECTION.
ACTUALLY, SHE'S PRACTICALLY A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY NOW...
...AS MY YOUNGER SISTER CARES VERY MUCH FOR HER, AND ALL.
IF SHE HAD NOT COME CRYING TO ME, BEGGING FOR YOUR RESCUE...
...I WOULD NEVER, EVER ALLOW...
...SOMEONE LIKE YOU ANYWHERE NEAR THE CASTLE! YOU'RE TROUBLE JUST WAITING TO HAPPEN!
ｶﾞﾀﾝ
ｶﾞﾀﾝ

...FIRIEL... PLEASE...
. don't tell..
..n't.. tel..
HM? DON'T TELL HER...
...WHAT?
!

.....
NGH...
...PRO
...
...
PROFESSOR
....!

HEY, BOY.
WE'VE ALMOST REACHED THE--
...TO GET ANGRY AT THAT KIND OF CHILD?
...ARE VERY ALIKE.
...THIS BOY AND FIRIEL...
NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT
HOW CRUEL COULD I BE...
NEITHER HAVE PARENTS TO RELY UPON.

THEY'VE BRANDED HIM!
LIKE A FARMER BRANDS CATTLE...!

EVEN WOUNDED LIKE THAT, HE STILL STUBBORNLY REFUSED TO SPEAK ANYTHING OF RESULTS
...KOFF...
...NGK ...!
THEY BRANDED A CHILD...!
"NOTHING'S CHANGED."
"YOU'RE EXACTLY THE SAME AS THEM."

DOCTOR MELING!
HOW IS RU--ER, THE BOY, DOING?
NO NEED TO RILE YOURSELF UP...
...YOUNG ROLAND PUP.
WHERE DID YOU DIG UP THAT BOY, ANYWAY?
I'D RATHER YOU DIDN'T BRING ME THINGS LIKE THAT--IT SENT MY BLOOD PRESSURE SHOOTING SKYWARD!
WHAT INCREDIBLE WILLPOWER.

BRUISES. WELTS. CUTS. LACERATIONS. BROKEN BONES.
...BUT STILL! ANYBODY WITH EYES CAN SEE HE'S BEEN TORTURED, AND BADLY.
HE'S MADE IT THROUGH THE WORST OF IT...
WHAT ON EARTH COULD'VE POSSESSED SOMEBODY TO DO SOMETHING LIKE THAT TO HIM?
HE'LL HAVE IT FOR THE REST OF HIS LIFE.
AAH. SEEN THAT BRAND, HAVE YOU?
BURNS.
!
SO YOUNG, YET HE'S ALREADY GOTTEN HIMSELF TANGLED UP IN SOMETHING UNBELIEVABLY HUGE.
POOR BOY.

BUT IT WAS ONLY A DREAM.
I THINK I HAD A DREAM...
...DAMP, STALE AIR...
...A DULL ACHE THROUGHOUT MY ENTIRE BODY...
I WAS BORN DOWN HERE IN THE DARKNESS. THERE'S NO REASON TAINTED HANDS LIKE MINE...
...A DREAM FILLED WITH LIGHT.
...AS LONG AS ALL THESE SENSATIONS WERE NORMAL, EVERYDAY THINGS.

...WOULD EVER BE ALLOWED TO TOUCH SUCH PURE LIGHT...
RUNE!
THANK GOOD-NESS!
YOU'RE FINALLY AWAKE!

I'M SO GLAD...!
I DIDN'T KNOW...
...YOU TURNED INTO ONE OF THE COUNT'S SERVANTS WHILE I WAS GONE, FIRIEL.
Hmph!
WERE THEY THE ONES WHO FORCED YOU TO WEAR THAT UGLY DRESS? OR DID YOU DO THAT YOURSELF?
I-I DIDN'T HAVE ANY CHOICE!
WELL, HIS MOUTH CERTAINLY HASN'T GOTTEN ANY NICER.
Hrmph!
IF I HADN'T GONE TO THE ROLANDS FOR HELP, I NEVER WOULD'VE BEEN ABLE TO SAVE YOU!
YOU SHOULD BE SURE TO SAY "THANK YOU" TO LORD EUSIS LATER.
I WILL NOT! OF ALL THE NOBLES AROUND HERE, HE'S THE WORST OF THE LOT!

HE SAID YOU WERE "UNDER THE ROLAND FAMILY'S PROTECTION."
HE TOLD ME, FIRIEL! RIGHT TO MY FACE!
HE SAID IT LIKE YOU WERE JUST SOME TRINKET THAT ALREADY BELONGED TO THE COUNT!
I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO DECIDES WHO I BELONG TO.

BUT...
...BE THAT AS IT MAY, WE'RE GOING TO STAY HERE FOR A WHILE.
...YOU ALWAYS HAVE YOUR FEET PLANTED FIRMLY ON THE GROUND.
I'M NOT HURT ALL THAT BAD.
SO WE'LL STAY UNTIL YOU'RE BETTER ENOUGH TO GET UP AND WALK, OKAY?
NO MATTER WHAT SITUATION YOU'RE IN...
YOU NEVER CHANGE.
THERE'S A REALLY, REALLY GOOD DOCTOR HERE, AFTER ALL.

...TELL ME, PLEASE.
WHAT DID THOSE MEN DO TO YOU?
NEITHER LORD EUSIS NOR DOCTOR MELING...
...WILL TELL ME A THING!
...NOTHING.
THAT'S A LIE!
IF THEY DID NOTHING TO YOU, YOU WOULDN'T BE HURT!
THERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU'RE BETTER OFF NOT KNOWING.

"SOMEDAY IT MAY BLOOM..."
"...INTO A DEADLY BLACK ROSE."
RUNE, PLEASE! I NEED TO GET THIS ALL STRAIGHT!
WHAT ARE THOSE MEN TO YOU? ARE THEY YOUR FRIENDS? ENEMIES?
OR IS THE REAL ENEMY THE ROLANDS?

THOSE MEN... ARE THE ENEMY.
I'LL NEVER FORGIVE THEM. EVER.
THE LIGHT...
SOMEDAY I'LL MAKE THEM PAY.
...IT'S GETTING DROWNED OUT...
WHAT THEY... DID...CAN'T EVER... BE...
RUNE?
...BY THE DARKNESS...

WARM, FAMILIAR DARKNESS... IS WRAPPING AROUND ME...
RUNE!
HOW INTER-ESTING.
コト…

FIRIEL DEE.
EDILENE'S DAUGHTER ...
...BY PROFESSOR DEE.
AND SHE IS THERE AT MY CASTLE.
YOUR GRACE.
WE HAVE ARRIVED AT TONIGHT'S LODGINGS.

I AM SURE YOU ARE VERY EAGER TO BE HOME.
YOUR LONG JOURNEY FROM THE STAR QUEEN'S PALACE AT HIERAGLION WILL SOON BE OVER, YOUR GRACE.
TOMORROW, WE ENTER RUALGO LANDS.
YES.
I'M QUITE LOOKING FORWARD TO IT.

HE DOESN'T TALK AT ALL.
MAMA TABITHA?
SO HE'S CLOSED HIS HEART OFF TO EVERYONE.
I KNOW, DEAR. SOME REALLY AWFUL THINGS MUST'VE HAPPENED TO HIM BEFORE.
THAT'S THE ONLY WAY HE COULD PROTECT HIMSELF.
HELLO!
MY NAME'S FIRIEL!

Chapter 8: Resolution

THERE'RE NO BAD MEN IN SERA FIELD. NOBODY'S GONNA PICK ON YOU HERE.

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……
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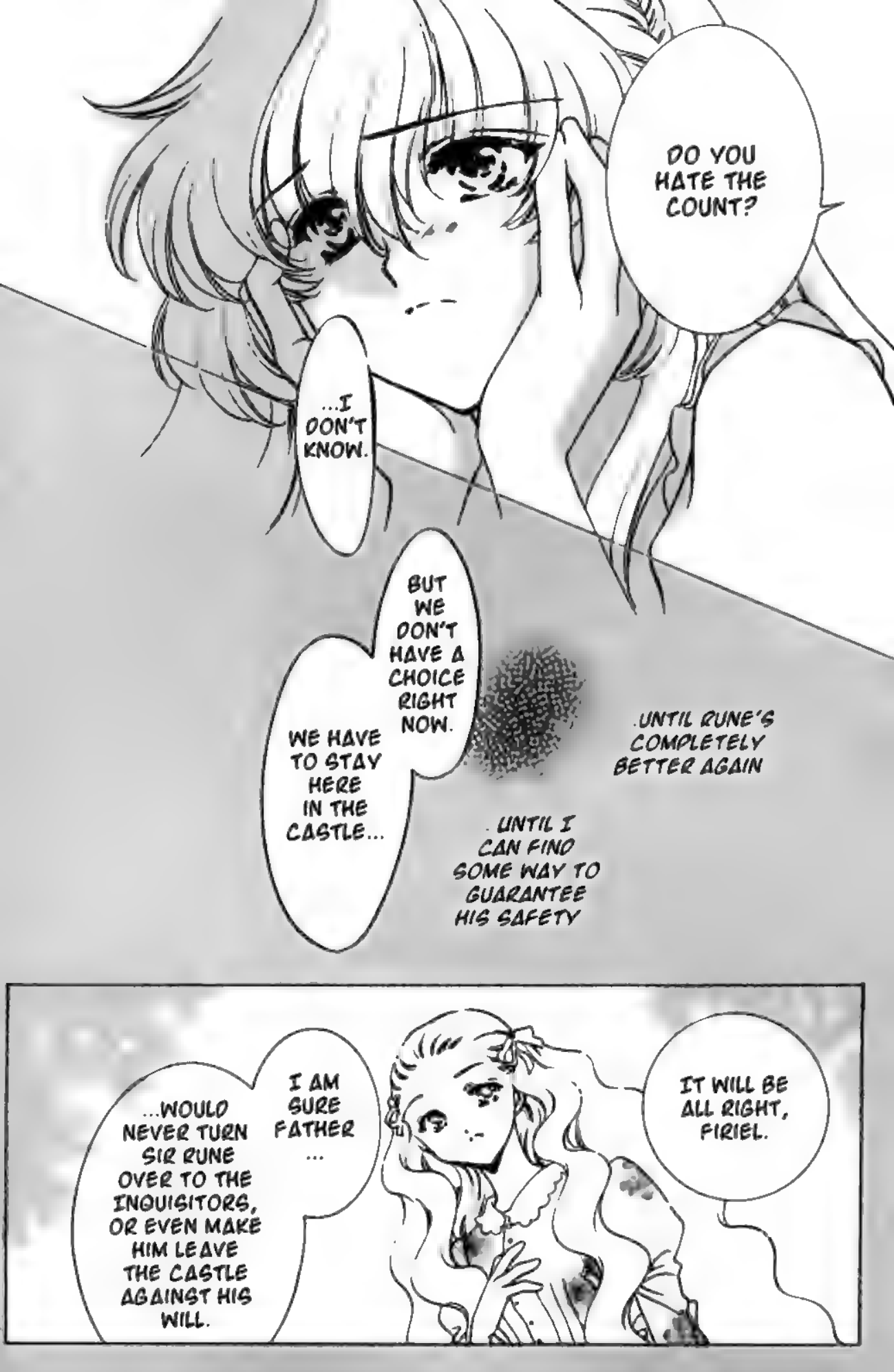
タタタ…

GWAAH!!
OH. IT'S YOU AGAIN, MISS FIRIEL.
IT NEVER CEASES TO AMAZE ME THAT YOU CAN MAKE IT ALL THE WAY FROM THE EAST WING TO THE WEST WING WITHOUT GETTING CAUGHT.
OH, YOUR HERB BASKET! I'M SO SORRY!
ボコ
HELLO, DOCTOR MELING!
Eep!
CAREFUL-- THAT ONE'S POISONOUS. IT'LL GIVE YOU ONE NASTY RASH.
YOU'VE COME TO SEE THAT WHELP AGAIN, EH?
WELL, YOU PICKED THE RIGHT TIME. GO ON UP AND SEE IF YOU CAN'T TALK SOME SENSE INTO HIM.

HIS BODY'S BEEN COMPLETELY HEALED FOR DAYS...
...BUT HE KEEPS HIMSELF SHUT UP IN THAT MUSTY ROOM ALL DAY LONG WITH A GLOOMY EXPRESSION ON HIS FACE. THAT'S GOT ME WORRIED
RUNE!

THEY KEEP SAYING "PROPER LADIES" DON'T EVER GO INTO "PROPER GENTLEMEN'S" ROOMS.
WHY ARE YOU COMING THROUGH THE WINDOW?
'CAUSE THE STAIRS ARE CRAWLING WITH PEOPLE!
THE FOLKS AROUND HERE ARE SO WEIRD!
Oof!
WELL, I SAY THAT YOU AND I ARE LIKE BROTHER AND SISTER, SO IT DOESN'T COUNT.
squeeze
THE COUNT IS SUPPOSED TO BE ARRIVING SOMETIME TOMORROW.

OH. GOOD FOR HIM.
RUNE! THIS IS IMPOR-TANT!
I HAVE AN AUDIENCE WITH HIM TOMORROW ...
...BUT I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT TO SAY. I MEAN...
...WE OWE THE ROLAND FAMILY SO MUCH FOR EVERY-THING THEY'VE DONE. BUT THE COUNT HIMSELF ...!
...HE WAS THE ONE WHO IMPRISONED MOTHER AND THE PROFESSOR IN SERA FIELD'S TOWER.
SERA FIELD SITS UP AT THE EDGE OF THE WORLD. ITS WINTERS ARE HARSH.
AND I HEARD THE REASON MOTHER DIED SO YOUNG...
...IS BECAUSE THE HARD LIFE IN THE TOWER WEAKENED HER.


DO YOU HATE THE COUNT?
...I DON'T KNOW.
BUT WE DON'T HAVE A CHOICE RIGHT NOW.
WE HAVE TO STAY HERE IN THE CASTLE...
.UNTIL RUNE'S COMPLETELY BETTER AGAIN
. UNTIL I CAN FIND SOME WAY TO GUARANTEE HIS SAFETY
IT WILL BE ALL RIGHT, FIRIEL.
I AM SURE FATHER ...
...WOULD NEVER TURN SIR RUNE OVER TO THE INQUISITORS, OR EVEN MAKE HIM LEAVE THE CASTLE AGAINST HIS WILL.

THE RESEARCH CONTAINED WITHIN IT IS SAID TO BE CAPABLE OF CHANGING OUR WHOLE WORLD.
THAT'S WHAT THOSE BLACK-CLOAKED MEN WERE SO DESPERATE TO GET THEIR HANDS ON...
FATHER WOULD NEVER BE SO FOOLISH...
...AS TO LET KNOWLEDGE THAT VALUABLE SLIP THROUGH HIS FINGERS AND PASS INTO ANOTHER'S HANDS.
HOW CAN YOU KNOW THAT FOR SURE, ADALE?
BECAUSE SIR RUNE IS THE ONLY ONE WHO KNOWS WHERE THE EPHEMERIS IS, OF COURSE.
I JUST KNOW HE'LL NEVER SAY A WORD ABOUT HIS RESEARCH, ESPECIALLY NOT TO THE COUNT!
BUT...
...RUNE IS STUBBORN ENOUGH TO MAKE A MULE JEALOUS.
THEN WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN?
?
Sigh

RUNE...
...TELL ME SOME-THING.
THAT RESEARCH YOU AND THE PROFESSOR DID, THE EPHEMERIS... WHAT IS IT? WHAT IS IT ALL ABOUT?
IT'S AN "ASTRAL CALENDAR."
A CALENDAR?
Phew!
THAT'S ALL IT IS?
THAT'S... NOT ALL IT IS...?
THERE'S SOMETHING DIFFERENT... SPECIAL ABOUT THIS CALENDAR...?

IF THEY WERE HARM-LESS, POWER-LESS CONCEPTS ...
...DO YOU REALLY THINK PEOPLE WOULD HATE AND FEAR THEM LIKE THEY DO?
FIRIEL, WHY DO YOU THINK SOME THINGS EARN THE STIGMA OF "HERESY"?
IT'S BETTER YOU KNOW NOTHING ABOUT THIS.
IF YOU EVER DID LEARN ANY-THING...
...THEN ALL THE PROFESSOR'S EFFORTS TO KEEP YOU SAFE WILL HAVE BEEN POINTLESS.
IT...BURNS.
MY RIGHT SHOULDER HURTS WHERE THE LIGHT TOUCHED IT.

WH-WHY DON'T WE GO FOR A WALK IN THE GARDEN?
LIM, RUNE...?
SOME SUNLIGHT AND FRESH AIR WOULD BE REALLY GOOD FOR YOU.
PLEASE?
WHAT'S HAPPEN-ING?
ANXIETY SUDDENLY WELLED UP INSIDE ME
I HAD THE WORST FEELING...
YOU DON'T BELONG IN THE DARKNESS
...FIRIEL.

...THAT RUNE WAS DRIFTING AWAY FROM ME, TO SOME PLACE I'D NEVER BE ABLE TO FOLLOW.
YOU SHOULD PROBABLY GO NOW...
...FIRIEL.

IF I DON'T THINK OF SOMETHING, I'M GOING TO WIND UP HELPLESS, JUST DRAGGED ALONG IN THE FLOW OF THINGS...
MY AUDIENCE WITH THE COUNT IS TOMORROW!
HOW AM I GOING TO PROTECT RUNE IF I CAN'T GET MY OWN THOUGHTS TOGETHER?
IT'S NO GOOD. I CAN'T THINK OF A THING.
Ahh...
...MANIPULATED AT WILL BY THE VASTLY MORE EXPERIENCED COUNT.
OH GOSH, WHAT TO DO? WHAT TO DO?!
I MEAN, I'M JUST A COUNTRY GIRL! THERE'S NO WAY I COULD STAND UP TO AN OPPONENT LIKE HIM!

FIRIEL! ♡
EEK!
MY, YOU LOOK AWFULLY GLOOMY.
ARE YOU WORRIED ABOUT MEETING FATHER?
……
FIRIEL, DO YOU LIKE HORSES?
HORSES?
WOW!

SUCH BEAUTIFUL CREATURES!
THE GRAY IS CECIL ...
...AND THE CHESTNUT IS REDHOU.
BOTH ARE PUREBREDS ...
...SO THEY ARE QUITE SPIRITED. LEARNING TO RIDE THEM WELL CAN BE DIFFICULT.
I HAVE BEEN BUCKED OFF MORE TIMES THAN I CAN COUNT.
I'VE NEVER BEEN GOOD WITH LARGE ANIMALS.
HORSES UNDERSTAND THAT, I'M SURE. THAT MUST BE WHY THEY NEVER LISTEN TO ME.
YOU'VE NEVER RIDDEN BEFORE, HAVE YOU, FIRIEL?
NO, BUT I GREW UP AROUND SHEEP AND GOATS.
YOU AREN'T AFRAID?

HURRY UP AND TEACH ME HOW TO RIDE, ADALE! I CAN'T WAIT!
...BUT THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I'VE SEEN HORSES THIS GORGEOUS!
NOT REALLY. I'VE ALWAYS THOUGHT HORSES WERE WONDER-FUL ANIMALS ...
Neigh!!
YEEK!
THAT'S BETTER. SHE IS MUCH MORE LIKE HER USUAL SELF NOW.
Hmm!

EUSIS, COME LOOK.
THINGS ARE GETTING QUITE ENTER-TAINING DOWN BELOW.
Neigh!!
GOODNESS! FIRIEL, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
I'M FINE.
YOWCH!
ﾋﾋﾝ!!

FIRIEL?
I'D RATHER NOT. WATCHING ADALE RIDE IS BAD FOR MY MENTAL HEALTH.
NO, NO. THE ONE I'M TALKING ABOUT IS OUR FAIR BRONZE-HAIRED MAIDEN.
IT'S FASCI-NATING. THEY MAY BE COUSINS, BUT THEIR PERSONALITIES ARE VASTLY DIFFERENT.
FIRST THERE'S PRINCESS ADALE, WITH HER PALE HAIR, GENTLE AS A DELICATE FLOWER WAVING IN A BREEZE.
ON THE OTHER HAND WE HAVE MISS FIRIEL...
...WITH HER VIVID AMBER HAIR, LIMBER CARRIAGE...
...AND SHEER VIVACIOUSNESS. SHE IS TRULY A JOY TO WATCH.

SHE'S AS HARDY AS THE HIGHLAND WILDFLOWERS OF HER HOME.
FRESH-- NOT THE TYPE USUALLY SEEN AROUND HERE.
F...Firiel, could we perhaps... rest a moment?
Gasp!
I...I'm exhausted ...!
IS IT ALL RIGHT IF I GET DOWN NOW, RED-HOU?
SURE!
FIRIEL!
WELL, I GUESS THAT COUNTS AS DOING WHAT I ASKED.
STILL, YOU'RE A REALLY NICE HORSE.
I HOPE WE GET TO BE GOOD FRIENDS.

THANKS FOR LETTING ME RIDE YOU TODAY, RED-HOU.
IT WAS LOTS OF FUN!
I THINK YOU WILL DO FINE WITH FATHER, FIRIEL.
THINK LESS AND ACT ON YOUR INSTINCTS.
THAT IS YOUR STRENGTH ...
TO FACE THINGS LARGER THAN YOURSELF NATURALLY, WITHOUT FEAR.

LORD EUSIS IS THE SAME WAY.
THE FIRST HORSE HE RECEIVED AS HIS VERY OWN...
...WAS AN EXTREMELY PROUD ANIMAL WHO WOULDN'T LISTEN TO ANY HUMAN. EVERYONE WAS QUITE SURPRISED WHEN HE TAMED IT IN ONLY A FEW DAYS.
MY BROTHER IS SO STRAIGHT-FORWARD, GENTLE AND WARM-HEARTED.
IN THAT WAY, I BELIEVE YOU AND HE ARE VERY MUCH ALIKE.
HUH?
SO EVERY-THING WILL BE ALL RIGHT.
GO MEET FATHER JUST THE WAY YOU ARE NOW...
...AND LET HIM KNOW WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU.
AS LONG AS YOU KNOW EXACTLY WHAT THAT IS...

EVERYTHING WILL BE JUST FINE.
...NO ONE WILL EVER BE ABLE TO SWAY YOU FROM YOUR PATH TO THEIRS.
WHAT'S...
...MOST IMPORTANT TO ME...

YOU TAUGHT ME...
TO LOOK UP AT THE SKY AND SEE THE STARS.
YOU LET ME BELIEVE THAT MAYBE...
...EVEN SOMEONE AS TAINTED BY BLOOD AND DARKNESS AS ME COULD CHANGE.
PRO-FESSOR ...

MY NAME IS FIRIEL.
CAN YOU SAY IT?
TO ME, SERA FIELD WAS A PLACE OF WARMTH.
...FEE ...REE ...EL...
THE MOMMA GOAT IS "AMY."
SEE? SHE ISN'T SCARY.
"MASTER BO" WORKS ALL DAY.
THE LADY WHO CARES FOR YOU... ..."MAMA TABITHA."
ALL THE WORDS FIRIEL TAUGHT ME WERE GENTLE, SOFT WORDS.
...."SWEET"...
THIS IS "SUGAR."
IT'S "SWEET."
THAT'S IT!
NONE OF THEM COULD EVER HURT ME.

IT FELT LIKE I'D BEEN REBORN...
THE DARKNESS ...!
IT WAS ONLY SLEEPING, NOT DEAD!
BUT I WAS WRONG.
...UNFORGETTABLE PULSE.
A CONSTANT, UNSTOPPABLE...
...I'LL MAKE THEM PAY!!
I SWEAR...
MY NEW SCARS THROB...
I'LL NEVER FORGIVE THEM.

...HELP ME...
... PRO-FESSOR ...
... PLEASE ...!
YOUR GLASSES...THE PROTECTIVE CHARM YOU GAVE ME... THEY'RE BROKEN...!
ARE YOU OKAY? ARE YOUR INJURIES HURTING?

...THAT I'LL ALWAYS PROTECT YOU, NO MATTER WHAT. I PROMISE!
RUNE?
I JUST WANTED TO TELL YOU...
I DON'T WANT TO LOSE ANYONE ELSE CLOSE TO ME.

IF IT'S THE ONLY WAY TO PROTECT SOMEONE I LOVE...
I DON'T WANT TO FEEL THAT LOSS EVER AGAIN.
...THEN I'LL STAND UP AND FACE ANYONE, NO MATTER WHO IT IS!

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU FEEL THE NEED TO ASK OF ME, MISS FIRIEL DEE?
YES, MY LORD. ABOUT RUNE.
I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW WHAT YOU INTEND TO DO WITH HIM.

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU FEEL THE NEED TO ASK OF ME?
...THE MAN WHO HAD MOTHER AND THE PROFESSOR IMPRISONED IN SERA FIELD.
THIS IS THE COUNT OF RUALGO...
I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW WHAT YOU INTEND TO DO WITH HIM.
YES, MY LORD. ABOUT RUNE.

Chapter 9: Star's Destiny

...I SEE.
YOU CERTAINLY ARE EDILENE'S DAUGHTER.
NOT A WORD ABOUT THE PAST, JUST QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE. HUNH.

COME WITH ME.
ADALE ...?
NO.
THIS LADY'S EYES ARE AS BLUE AS THE SEA.
"THE BLUE PRINCESS."
THIS IS A PORTRAIT OF HER MAJESTY, PRINCESS EDILENE.

THIS IS...MY MOTHER?
IT WAS AS IF SHE WAS BORN ADORNED WITH THE CORONA OF A STAR.
HER PERSONALITY SPARKLED WITH BOTH PASSION AND COMPASSION.
NO ONE HAD EVER SEEN HER LIKE. SHE WAS INTEL-LIGENT, WISE, AND UN-AFRAID ...
SHE WAS ALL THE CHARISMA AND POWER OF THE ROYAL FAMILY IN THE BODY OF A SINGLE WOMAN.
...TO ACT ON HER DECI-SIONS.
EVERYONE WAS CERTAIN THAT SHE WOULD BE THE NEXT STAR QUEEN ASTRAEA.
YET, EVERY NOW AND AGAIN, HER SEA-BLUE EYES WOULD TURN LONELY AND SHADOWED...
...AS IF SHE WERE SADLY GAZING TOWARD SOME FARAWAY PLACE NO ONE ELSE COULD SEE.

"EDILENE! YOU LOOK LIKE YOU'VE HAD A VERY ENTERTAINING DAY TODAY."
THIS MAN...
ONE DAY...
EDILENE AND I KNEW EACH OTHER AS CHILDREN. WE WERE RAISED TOGETHER.
BUT WHEN SHE HAD THAT LOOK, EVEN I FOUND HER TOO DISTANT, TOO DIFFICULT TO APPROACH.
"I MET THE STRANGEST MAN TODAY!"
SHE SPOKE OF YOUR FATHER, PROFESSOR GIDEON DEE, THEN A YOUNG RESEARCHER AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF THE SCIENCES.

BOTH OF THEM ESCAPED THE PALACE, HAND IN HAND.
HE WAS SOON EXPELLED FROM BOTH THE ACADEMY AND THE PALACE.
HIS RADICAL RESEARCH WAS ONLY PART OF THE REASON. THE OTHER WAS THE PRINCESS'S GROWING FASCINATION WITH HIM.
"SEIZE THEM!"
THE STAR QUEEN PROMPTLY DECLARED THEM BOTH TRAITORS TO THE THRONE.
IN GRAAL, ALL TRAITORS TO THE THRONE...
...ARE EXECUTED. BUT WE JUST... COULD NOT KILL EDILENE.
SO MY FATHER AND I TOOK THEM TO A PLACE NO ONE KNEW, SERA FIELD, AND HID THEM IN THE TOWER THERE.
DO YOU BELIEVE WHAT WE DID TO BE EVIL, YOUNG MISS DEE?

I DON'T KNOW, MY LORD.
WHILE SHE MAY BE EDILENE'S DAUGHTER...
...SHE IS STILL PEASANT-RAISED.
SO I CAN'T SAY IF SHE WAS GRATEFUL FOR WHAT YOU DID...
...OR NOT.
I NEVER HAD THE CHANCE TO SPEAK WITH MY MOTHER.
BUT, IF I MAY REMIND YOUR LORD-SHIP...

BRIEF AND TO THE POINT, I SEE.
RATHER THAN GET CAUGHT UP IN THE TANGLED WEB OF THE PAST...
...SHE CHOOSES TO FOCUS ON THE PRESENT, ON WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT RIGHT NOW.
...I STILL HAVEN'T GOTTEN AN ANSWER TO MY QUESTION.
THIS QUALITY OF HERS MAKES HER UNLIKE BOTH EDILENE AND ADALE.
AS YOU WISH.
I WILL SHELTER AND PROTECT THE BOY RUNE FROM BOTH THE "STAFF OF THE SERPENT" ORGANIZATION AND THE INQUISITORS.
HOWEVER, IN EXCHANGE--

FIRIEL!
WHAT DID FATHER SAY?
WAS IT ANYTHING TERRIBLY UNREASONABLE?
ADALE ...
"IF THE PROFESSOR'S APPRENTICE WERE TO LEAVE THIS CASTLE, HE WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY BE IN IMMEDIATE DANGER."
"NONETHELESS, THE ROLAND FAMILY HAS THE POWER TO KEEP HIM SAFE."
"I WILL DO MY UTMOST TO PROTECT RUNE'S LIFE."
"HOWEVER, IN EXCHANGE, I WOULD LIKE YOU TO REMAIN BY ADALE'S SIDE."
"STAY WITH HER, LEARN WITH HER...AND ONE DAY, WHEN ADALE TAKES HER PLACE IN HIERAGLION'S COURT, YOU WILL GO WITH HER."
"TO HIERAGLION ...?!"

I'M TO GO THERE?
I'M SO HAPPY YOU'LL BE COMING WITH ME, FIRIEL.
HIERAGLION. THE GIANT PALACE SAID TO BE MADE ENTIRELY OF PLATINUM...
...THE PLACE WHERE THE STAR QUEEN HERSELF LIVES.
THOUGH I'M SURE IT WILL BE A VERY UN-COMFORT-ABLE PLACE FOR YOU.

THIS IS IMPORTANT, FIRIEL!
TO WIN THE BATTLE FOR THE THRONE, A QUEEN-IN-WAITING MUST BE BETTER THAN EVERYONE ELSE IN EVERYTHING!
HUH?!
TRUTH BE TOLD, I'M NOT VERY CONFIDENT I CAN BECOME THE STAR QUEEN.
...AND SHE IS AS INTELLIGENT AS ANY PROFESSOR AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY.
...IS AS GOOD AS ANY GENTLE-MAN AT BOTH RIDING AND FENCING...
MY SISTER LEANDRA ...
WHAT KIND OF PERSON IS SHE?
LEANDRA. THE OTHER QUEEN-IN-WAITING.
SHE'S A DEMON!
BECAUSE I...I AM ENTIRELY TOO SLOW AT TAG!

BOTH BEAUTIFUL AND CUNNING, SHE CAN ENTHRALL ANYONE, MAN OR WOMAN.
BUT UNDERNEATH THAT GODDESS' SMILE...
...GROWLS A RUTHLESS BEAST OBLIVIOUS TO ALL BUT HER GOALS.
LEANDRA IS AN EXPAN-SIONIST.
SHE WANTS TO EXPAND GRAAL'S TERRITORY INTO BRIGION TO THE EAST AND ALL THE WAY DOWN TO THE SOUTHERN FOREST.
IF SHE EVER BECOMES STAR QUEEN...
...SHE'LL PLUNGE GRAAL STRAIGHT INTO WAR!
THAT MUST NEVER BE ALLOWED TO HAPPEN!!

FIRIEL!
PLEASE STAY WITH ME!
JUST HAVING YOU BY MY SIDE...
...WILL BE A GREATER HELP TO ME THAN ANYTHING!
IT WAS MY CHOICE TO WALK THE PATH TO THE THRONE.
I HAVE LONG PREPARED MYSELF TO GIVE UP MANY THINGS IN ORDER TO REACH IT.
FALLING IN LOVE AND GETTING MARRIED LIKE A NORMAL GIRL...
...HOLDING MY OWN CHILDREN...
...ALL THOSE THINGS BELONG TO A WORLD DIFFERENT FROM THE STAR QUEEN'S.
BUT THEN I MET YOU.
YOU LIVE A LIFE THAT HAS ALWAYS BEEN NOTHING MORE THAN A DREAM TO ME. A NORMAL LIFE NOT BOUND BY THE TIES OF A ROYAL HERITAGE.

YOU LIVE MY DREAM, FIRIEL.
MY PATH IS CHOSEN AND I SHALL NOT STRAY, BUT AT LEAST...
"BECAUSE I ADMIRE YOU, FIRIEL."
...IF YOU ALLOW ME, I'D LIKE TO WATCH YOU LIVE IT.
FROM THE OUTSIDE, ADALE'S LIFE IS THE DREAM...
...BUT FOR ALL ITS LUXURIES, IT'S REALLY A VERY LONELY ONE.

I'M SORRY, ADALE.
STAYING WITH YOU ISN'T MY OWN CHOICE.
IT'S PART OF THE DEAL I MADE WITH THE COUNT...
...SO THAT RUNE WILL STAY SAFE.
BUT THERE IS ONE THING I CAN PROMISE YOU, AS FRIENDS.
I LIKE YOU A LOT.
AND I HOPE YOU GET TO BE STAR QUEEN INSTEAD OF LEANDRA.
SO I WON'T EVER DO ANYTHING TO BETRAY YOU.

THANK YOU, FIRIEL! I'M SO HAPPY!!
IT DOESN'T MATTER TO ME...
...WHOSE SAKE YOU DO THIS FOR.
I'M JUST GLAD...
...THAT NOW WE CAN DO ALL SORTS OF THINGS TOGETHER!

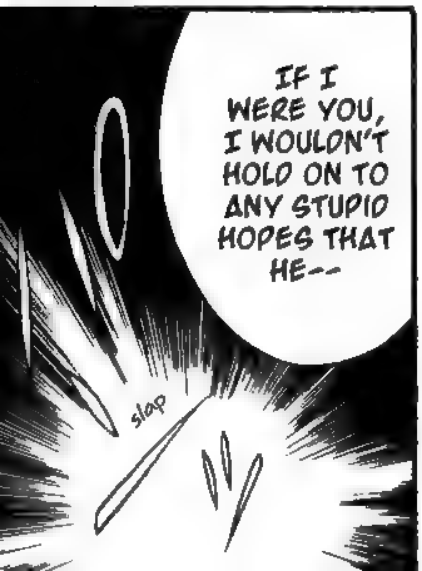
Grr...
WELL, THAT WAS QUICK.
IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG FOR THE COUNT TO MAKE A PAWN OF YOU, DID IT?
RUNE!
JUST WHO DO YOU THINK I'M DOING THIS FOR?!
"I BELIEVE ADALE IS TRULY FIT TO BE THE FUTURE STAR QUEEN."
HIS LORDSHIP TOLD ME THIS, ALSO...
BESIDES ...

"THE HIGH COURT AT HIERAGLION IS A VIPER'S NEST OF POLITICAL INTRIGUE, AND NOT EVERYONE THERE WILL WELCOME HER. SHE WILL NEED A TRUSTED FRIEND BY HER SIDE WITH WHOM SHE CAN SPEAK PLAINLY."
"BUT PRESENTLY, SHE IS STILL LEARNING."
"THAT, FIRIEL, WILL BE YOU. IT IS A POSITION FROM WHICH YOU, TOO, WILL HAVE MUCH TO GAIN."
"... YOU COULD EASILY REQUEST SHE REPEAL THE LAW FORBIDDING PROFESSOR DEE'S RESEARCH, THUS MAKING IT A PERFECTLY LEGAL AREA OF STUDY."
"THEN, SHOULD YOU STILL BE AT HER SIDE..."
"ONCE ADALE HAS BEEN CROWNED AS THE NEXT STAR QUEEN, SHE WILL BE ABLE TO MAKE AND CHANGE THE LAWS."

...AND THE PROFESSOR COULD COME BACK HOME!
ISN'T THAT GREAT?
THEN YOU COULD CONTINUE YOUR RE-SEARCH...
I'M GOING TO DO MY BEST...
...AND STUDY REALLY HARD FOR--
"FOR ME"? HA. DON'T WASTE YOUR TIME.
I DON'T WANT YOU TO DO ANYTHING FOR ME.
WHY WON'T YOU JUST LET ME BE?

WHAT? DON'T TELL ME YOU REALLY BELIEVE...
...THE PROFESSOR'S EVER COMING BACK.

HE WENT TO THE DRAGON FOREST, FIRIEL. IT'S CALLED THAT FOR A REASON.
THE PLACE IS A PRIMEVAL JUNGLE CRAWLING WITH MAN-EATING DRAGONS.


IF I WERE YOU, I WOULDN'T HOLD ON TO ANY STUPID HOPES THAT HE--
slap

SO HOLY'S DEATH?
YOU'RE OF THE LIGHT.
I'M PART OF THE DARKNESS. YOU DON'T BELONG AROUND A HERETIC LIKE ME.
FIRIEL...
...DON'T EVER COME BACK HERE. PLEASE.

YEAH. SEE, WE WERE TRYING TO GET...
...PROFESSOR DEE'S WHEREABOUTS OUT OF HIM. WE HAD HIM CORNERED ON THE ROOF...
THAT WRINKLED OLD WITCH NEVER GIVES UP, I TELL YA.
...WHEN ASTRAEA'S LIGHTNING STRUCK.
HER LIGHTNING ALWAYS MANAGES TO FIND US, SOMEHOW.
IT BARELY MISSED, ZAPPING A CORNER OF THE TOWER.
WHILE WE WERE BUSY WITH THAT...
...BO HOLY SAW HIS CHANCE... AND HOPPED RIGHT OFF THE ROOF.
HE TOOK THE PROFESSOR'S LOCATION WITH HIM TO THE GRAVE.
THAT WAS SUICIDE, MY GOOD FELLOW.
SUICIDE? HIM?

BUT BELIEVE YOU ME, ASTRAEA'S HATRED OF THE HERETICAL AIN'T SANE!
HERESY. SOMETHING THE LAWS OF THIS WORLD CONDEMN ABOVE ALL ELSE.
THE ONE PERSON I WANTED MOST TO PROTECT IS SLOWLY HAVING HER FREEDOM BOUND BY INVISIBLE CHAINS...
...ALL BECAUSE OF ME!

FIRIEL, YOU NEED TO STAY AWAY FROM ME.
IT'S FOR THE BEST...

LORD EUSIS?!
FIRIEL.
MY LORD, WHAT ON EARTH ARE YOU DOING?!
GARDEN-ING. I GOT CAUGHT BY DOCTOR MELING.
I'VE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO SAY NO TO THE MAN.
WHAT'S THE MATTER?

...I SEE.
...I UNDERSTAND HOW PAINFUL HIS POSITION MUST BE TO HIM.
AS A MAN...
...THE MORE HE FEELS HE'S BECOME A BURDEN TO YOU.
THE HARDER YOU WORK AND THE MORE YOU DO FOR HIS SAKE...
BUT I DON'T THINK HE'S A BURDEN AT ALL!

I JUST...
I JUST WANT RUNE TO LIVE, MY LORD.
IF WHAT I'M DOING FOR HIS SAKE DISGUSTS HIM SO MUCH...
...WELL, THEN TOUGH! I'M NOT GOING TO STOP.
I CAN'T JUST SIT BACK AND DO NOTHING.
I CAN'T. EVEN IF IT MAKES RUNE HATE ME.

SO FATHER HAS MANAGED TO...ACQUIRE FIRIEL...
...SO THAT NO OTHER NOBLE FAMILY CAN TAKE ADVANTAGE OF HER ROYAL BLOOD AND USE HER AGAINST US.
AND HE DID IT BY USING HER PURE-HEARTED CONCERN FOR HER FRIEND.
BUT...
...EVER SINCE I MET HER THAT NIGHT AT THE BALL, I COULDN'T HELP BUT NOTICE THAT THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT HER. SOMETHING THAT MAKES PEOPLE WANT TO REACH OUT AND HELP HER HOWEVER THEY CAN.

I FEEL SO SAFE WHEN I'M WITH HIM.
IT'S LIKE HE'S SURROUNDED BY AN AURA OF COMFORT AND CARING.
BEING NEAR LORD EUSIS IS SO REASSURING.

WELL, THERE'S NOTHING FOR IT NOW BUT TO KEEP ON MOVING FORWARD!
I CAN'T UNLEARN WHAT I'VE LEARNED.
THERE'S NO GOING BACK TO BEING THE SHELTERED GIRL I WAS BACK IN SERA FIELD.

WE WERE EATEN ONCE, BUT THANKS TO THE EFFORTS OF A LOT OF WONDERFUL PEOPLE, WE WERE FINALLY RESCUED FROM THE BELLY OF DESPAIR.
WE'RE LIKE THE LITTLE GOATS WHO WERE CUT OUT OF THE WOLF'S STOMACH IN THAT FAIRY TALE.
BUT WE'VE EMERGED FROM THAT HARDSHIP STRONGER.
NEVER AGAIN WILL I LET SOMEONE I LOVE DIE.

STAY WITH ME, AND YOU'LL HAVE NO FUTURE...
... JUST DAY AFTER DAY OF RUNNING FROM THE STAR QUEEN'S JUSTICE
GO BACK TO HIERAGLION, EDILENE. NOW, BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE!
I HAVE NO FUTURE ANYWAY, GIDEON. NONE OF US DO.
AND I'M GOING TO MAKE ABSOLUTELY SURE THIS STORY HAS A HAPPY ENDING!
STOP FOLLOWING ME!

EVERYONE CALLS ME THEIR ONE HOPE, THEIR ONE STAR.
THERE IS NOTHING LEFT FOR OUR WORLD EXCEPT TO AWAIT THE END.
YOU MUST KNOW THIS ALREADY.
BUT THERE IS NO LONGER ANYTHING I CAN DO TO STOP ITS COMING BY MYSELF!
AND YOU ARE THE ONLY ONE WHO OFFERED TO SHARE MY BURDEN OF DESPAIR.
THE ONLY ONES AWARE OF THAT...
...ARE MOTHER, MYSELF, AND YOU... THE ONE PERSON WHO ARRIVED AT THAT TRUTH ON HIS OWN.

WHEN I MET YOU...
I FOUND I COULD SEE SOMETHING OTHER THAN OBLIVION FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE.
I SAW THE BIRTH OF A NEW STAR!
THE ONE PERSON WHO CAN CHANGE OUR WORLD...
...WILL NOT BE OF THE LIGHT.
ONLY SOMEONE OF BOTH THE LIGHT AND THE DARKNESS CAN DO THAT.

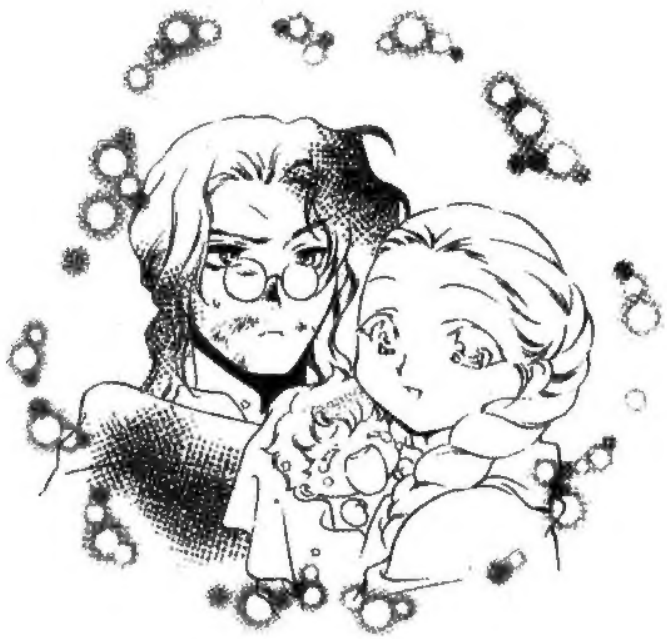
GIDEON.
TAKE ME WITH YOU.
PLEASE
OR ELSE OUR WORLD KNOWS ONLY THE END.
THERE REMAINS BUT ONE TINY, FLICKERING RAY OF HOPE.
PLEASE, DON'T LET IT FADE AWAY.

Well...
...it seems our story has finally gotten under way.
ポロン…

But I warn you now, Finiel...
...there is no "happily ever after" awaiting you at the end.
Not in this story.
Not unless you write a new ending.

End of Book 2

Hello, everyone! Thank you so much for picking up The Good Witch of the West volume two! This marks the end of Part One of the story (essentially, volume one of the novel). Currently, I have the honor of drawing Part Two, "The Secret Garden," for the Comics Blade manga anthology. Believe me when I tell you...
...I'm having the time of my life!!!
An all-girls private boarding academy! A garden of femininity! "Sister Firiel!" I'm so glad I'm alive. Really, I am. It may just be me, but Firiel seems to be...um... showing off a little bit more, too. (No more dresses. Now we're putting her in more form-fitting clothes!) Plus, my absolute favorite character makes her entrance, and then there's "Runette"... I'm having a ball with every page I draw. This is heaven, I swear!
2004.10.14 村川 春日子
Haruhiko Momokawa
Ms. Yuchie, thanks so much for all your help with this volume! Another big thanks goes out to my supervisor and all my friends for cheering me on. And I can never forget the support and encouragement I get from Ms. Ogiwara. Thank you!!!
The novels are being re-published by Chuo Kouron Shinsha. I heard Ms. Miho Satake is doing the new cover art. I adore the works she's done with unicorns, so...yeah. I really, really want those re-releases now. I wonder if I could get free copies...



A whole lot of fairy tales show up in Good Witch, so I drew something from "Thumbelina," just with Good Witch characters instead.
Thumbelina = Firiel
Swallow = Rune
I didn't really like how "Thumbelina" ended, so I hope this time it turns out better. Good luck Ru--er, Swallow!!

Dear Mother,

Before I can accompany Adale to Hieraglion, I must attend Taurus Academy, a finishing school for young ladies. It is run at a convent, but everyone here is so mean! None of the other girls like me and the Student Council runs everything with an iron fist. How anyone becomes a "lady" here, I do not know...

Firiel Dee

In the Next

THE GOOD WITCH OF THE WEST™